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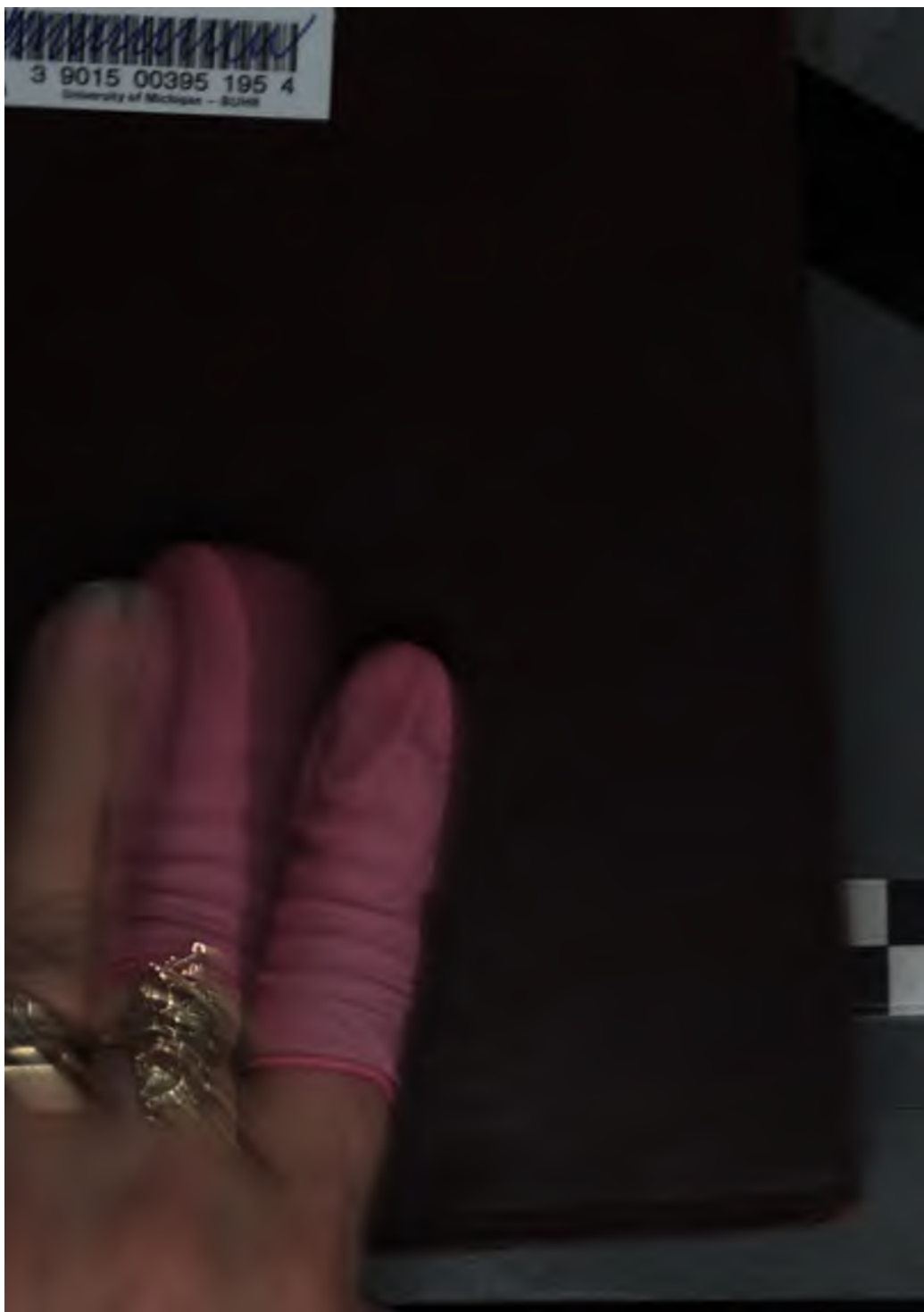
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THE RELIGIOUS SPIRIT  
IN THE POETS





# THE RELIGIOUS SPIRIT IN THE POETS



*William* BY THE RIGHT REV.  
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## PREFATORY NOTE

MY duties compel me to spend many hours in the train. In this way some forty or fifty hours in every month are occupied. These hours are opportunities of reading and writing. The papers gathered into the present volume are, generally speaking, the product of these railroad hours. From the nature of the case they are only fugitive studies, now brought together in deference to the kind wishes of others, who have read them in magazine form or who have heard the substance of some of them in lectures.



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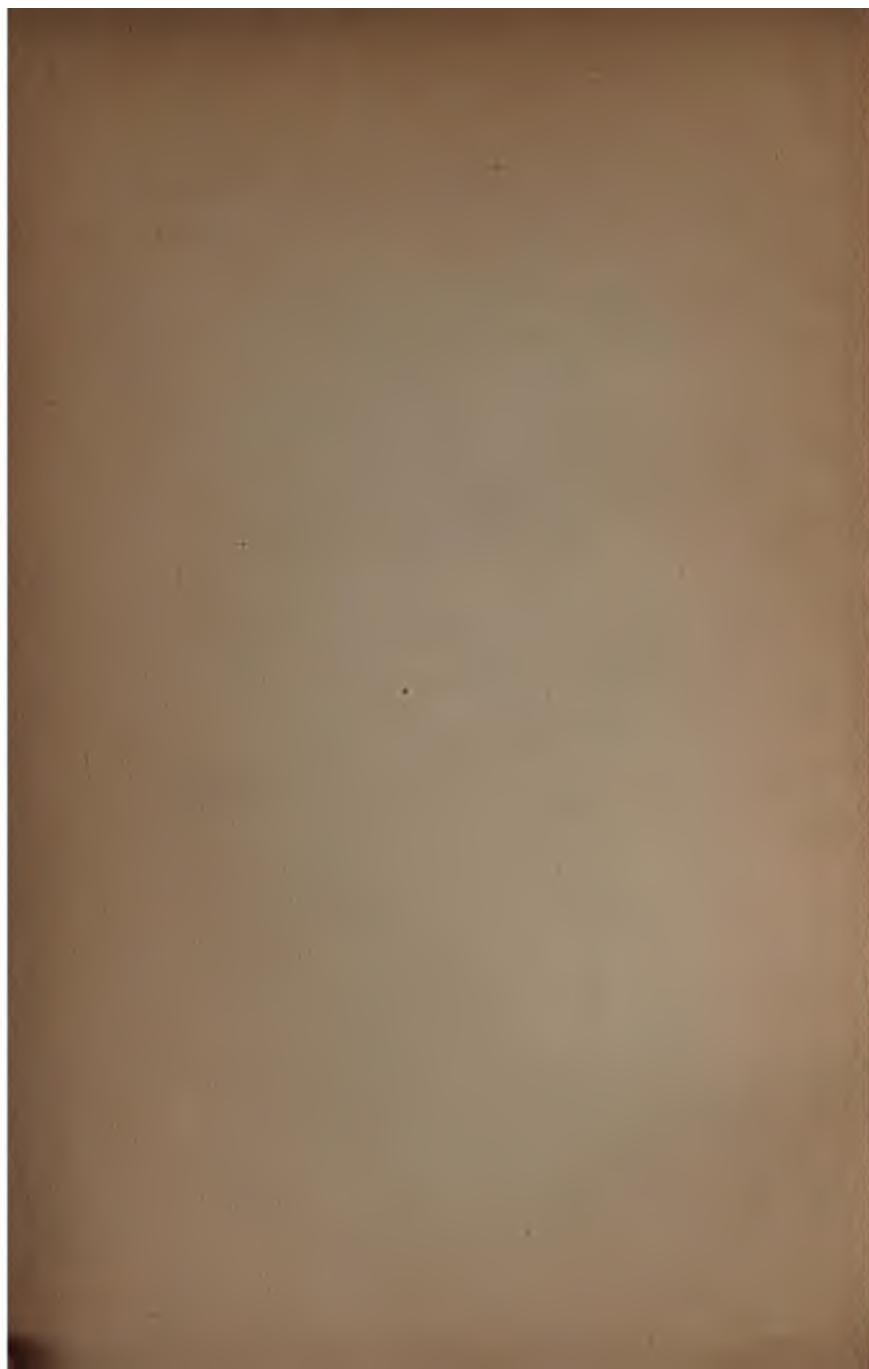


## CHAPTER I

### KINSHIP BETWEEN RELIGION AND POETRY

A YOUNG girl once went to visit the late Master of Balliol. She had with her a book. He asked her what she was reading. It was a semi-theological book. He suggested that Wordsworth would be more suitable reading. He meant to convey the simple truth that the religious element in poetry is often more potent for good than direct or formal theology. He was right. Theological treatises appeal to the speculative intellect; but they do not carry much nourishment to the soul. They are useful, but more from a rational than a spiritual point of view. They are valuable at times in clearing the mind, but they seldom feed the heart. There is another advantage in the religious influence of the poet. He is not, as a rule, self-conscious or intentional as the theological writer is. He does not irritate us by improving the occasion. If he is religious,





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## The Religious Spirit in the Poets

Lord. These are the familiar examples of this early ballad-dance, in which foot and voice and musical instrument combined. The most popular and impressive of these among the Greeks was that in honour of Dionysus, better known to us as Bacchus. The corn harvest, the gathering of the vintage, the coming of the flowers, the assurance of the spring, were all welcomed with festivals in honour of Dionysus.

Out of these festivals and appropriate ballad-dances sprang the dramatic art. The religious festival gave rise to the highest form of poetry. Dionysus, the bestower of the richest bounties of nature, was not a good god removed from sympathy with human pain. He was not one who lived regardless of mankind. He could suffer, and his sufferings had a deep significance. There were germs of tragedy in the ballad-dances in his honour. Not only the highest form of poetry but the highest form of drama rose out of a religious festival.

The same thought is more strikingly shown if we summon to our memory another god of the Greeks. Apollo stands higher in public esteem than Bacchus. Apollo is the god of art and science : he is pre-eminently in our thoughts the god of song ; but by a noble insight he is the

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god of purity also. Delphi was the place of his oracle. Thither trooped the thousands of perplexed souls who sought light and guidance. They went, not as the foolish and fashionable frivolity of to-day goes to the palmist or the astrologer merely to hear some tale of future fortune, they went also for counsel in the perplexities of life. The oracle might speak in dubious terms, but often the ambiguous answer veiled a great moral truth. The face of tomorrow depends on the conduct of to-day. When men are in perplexity they often stand at the parting of the ways of life, and the future is uncertain only because it lies in the hollow of the hand. Moreover, to the double-minded man even clear answers grow dim. The pure soul alone can read the oracle aright. The replies given at Delphi might sometimes be frivolous and evasively dexterous, but in its best times it bore witness to the existence of great governing principles of life. "The influence of Delphi," writes Professor Butcher, "was in no small measure akin to that of the Hebrew prophecy." There was the same attempt to bid men not to be content with surface views but to look into the heart of things.

Religion in the presence of the prophet and

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the oracle was lifted into a higher region. It was no longer a matter of ceremony and sacrifice. It belonged in its essence to a higher place than ritual and liturgy. It demanded simplicity, singleness of aim, honesty of heart, consistency of life. "What doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God?" "Thinkest thou that I will eat bull's flesh?" Such are the words which come to us from the poet-prophets of Israel. About the same time that Malachi was extolling righteous conduct in Israel, Greek writers were declaring "justice and goodness are the best of sacrifices, and prevail more with the gods than a hecatomb of victories," and in such teaching Professor Butcher tells us we hear the echo of the teaching of Delphi.

Thus religion and song were cradled together. Apollo was not the god of men who worshipped art for art's sake. The religious and the practical elements in human nature were too closely allied to be cut asunder to suit any one-sided theory. "Clean hands and a pure heart were required of all who would approach the holy hill either of Zion or Parnassus." The kinship between religion and poetry is no meaningless expression for those who realise that religion

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herself is the parent of song, and that in early times poetry was conditioned by the same law of purity and singleheartedness which is indispensable in religion. It is thus that our question is answered by the history of the dawn of the drama.

We turn now to facts which all can verify. We find that there is often a structural bond between religion and poetry. The framework of the greatest poems of the world depends upon certain current religious conceptions. Take away these and the whole structure will fall. The "Iliad" is built upon the Olympian theology. The "Æneid" not only shows us how the gods work in the affairs of men, but it introduces us to the great untravelled region of the underworld of shades. The theological conception of his time supplies Dante with the structure of the "Divina Commedia," and Milton in the "Paradise Lost" endeavours, with the aid of seventeenth century theology, to justify "the ways of God to men." The problems which arise out of the conflict between the experience of men and the conventional religious notions of the age are, in fact, the foundations of the greatest poems of the Hebrew, the Greek and the Teuton, of Job, Prometheus and Faust. We



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may form what theories we please about the essential relationship between religion and poetry; but it will remain for ever true that the imagination of the poets who have produced the great works of the world, have so employed the religious thought of their age that no one can enter into the spirit or trace the significance of these poems without some acquaintance with the theology of Judæa, Greece and Rome, of the Middle Ages, and the Reformation.

But the connection of religion and poetry is even closer than that of the framework of the epic and the drama. As has been hinted, poetry reflects the religious problems which agitate men's minds from age to age. The questions, "What relation do the unseen powers bear to human life?" "What influence do they exercise upon human destiny?" reach the poet's soul and stir his genius. That the gods do occupy themselves with human affairs is taken for granted in the poems of a nation's infancy. The gods are introduced as sharing in conflicts upon which men's fortunes, hopes and affections hang. Over the battlefields, when heroes contend, flit the forms of the immortals. Zeus and Mars, Juno and Minerva, Wodin and Thor, mingle in the storm of war to protect their favourites, to

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strike down their foes, or to receive the parting spirit of the warrior when he falls. Venus will shelter Paris by enveloping him in a heaven-sent mist. Pallas and Mars will put on armour and will mingle, disguised, as combatants in the fray.

With the progress of time men's thoughts are widened and their conception of the gods change. They put away the childish notion of the gods and goddesses; but the realisation of the inscrutable power or powers which influence the currents of human life still remains. There are certain aims and purposes which are being achieved, and, in the accomplishment of these, homes may be broken up and the happiness of individuals sacrificed. A dark, inscrutable necessity, which is not blind fate, but the action of a great though perhaps vaguely understood righteous principle, is discovered thwarting or overruling the actions of men. The recognition of some force which appeals to men's moral and religious instincts meets us in the tragedies of Æschylus and Sophocles. The strong religious element is still there. Men may no longer believe, as children did, in the exact literal personality of those who were called gods, but the divine is felt to be operative in human life. The

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vast and unexplored regions which lie beyond the range of man's investigating power afford scope for imagination. There are no uninhabited worlds, no regions where fortune, right, and intelligence do not find expression. There are forces encountered by man which prove alike his helplessness and his greatness. There are realms which challenge imagination and there are powers and incidents which provoke curiosity. Life teems with experiences which suggest problems, and with conflicts which create tragedies. The religious man will think and evolve a theology. The poet will think and produce a drama. There will be poetry in the theology of the one and there will be religion in the poetry of the other. The constant questions of existence combine to foster the religious element in poetry.

That this is the case the most casual glance at the poetry of the past will prove to us. One or two illustrations will suffice.

We turn to Æschylus, for example, and we find that the pressing sense of the power, not ourselves, which makes itself felt resistlessly in human life, becomes operative in the poet's works. He represents an advance in human thought. The more childish conceptions of the

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gods have lost hold upon men's minds. The thinking men and women of Athens can no longer believe in the capricious intervention of petulant and jealous deities in human affairs; but the great tide which moves forward and bears all human life along with it cannot be ignored. It must have a name. It is stronger than all gods. It is Fate or Necessity—man must endure.

I needs must bear  
My destiny as best I may, knowing well  
The might resistless of Necessity.

It is not, however, eyeless or senseless. It has the nature of deity, vague and dim perhaps, but great, with some wide moral sweep of action, as an overlord of gods.

This power is not understood. Its actions are mysterious to men; they look capricious, envious at times, enigmatical, but they are actions which mean discipline and order. The proud are lowered, the bribes of men are disdained, the curse comes but comes not causeless. There is a force or power which men may forget but which they cannot wholly ignore.

There come times when the most careless is compelled to recognise it. Men are startled into the religiousness, which in easy times pleasure

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helps them to forget, but which in hours of danger they are compelled to remember. The most natural illustration of this is Horace's well-known Ode, which I give in Conington's translation.

### PARCUS DEORUM.

My prayers were scant, my offerings few,  
While witless wisdom fool'd my mind ;  
But now I trim my sails anew,  
And trace the course I left behind.  
For lo ! the Sire of heaven on high,  
By whose fierce bolts the clouds are riven,  
To-day through an unclouded sky  
His thundering steeds and car has driven.  
E'en now dull earth and wandering floods,  
And Atlas' liminary range,  
And Styx, and Tænarus' dark abodes  
Are reeling. He can lowliest change  
And loftiest ; bring the mighty down  
And lift the weak ; with whirring flight  
Comes Fortune, plucks the Monarch's crown,  
And decks therewith some meaner wight.  
(Hor. Od., Bk. i. 34.)

Thus the poetical and the religious feeling join hands. They may not be indispensably necessary to one another. Indeed they are not. We shall see that poetry may be lusty and strong while quite indifferent to religion ; but nevertheless they cannot long remain sundered. Poetry has been glad to use the sublime ele-

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ments of religion to build up its most noble work; she has found in the deep religious problems of life her most invigorating food; she has reached her loftiest flights when religion has impelled her wings. Nor is the benefit wholly on one side. Poetry repays her debt, and religion finds in poetry her ally and evangelist. She has wrought some of her profoundest and most enduring impressions by the aid of poetry.

A verse may find him who a sermon flies.

And it is through the aid of poetry that religion has been able to rouse ardour and revive courage; and times without number the lonely heart of the exiled and weary warrior of the faith has been comforted and quickened by hearing one of the Songs of Zion.

## CHAPTER II

### RELIGION AND LITERARY INSPIRATION

THE religious sentiment was the cradle of the drama. It is not in the history of the Greek drama alone that we find evidence of this. The drama in France and in England owed its beginning to the influence of religion.

“The Church,” says an interesting French writer, “was in France the first Theatre.” This was literally true; for in the churches began those representations of religious history out of which the more established drama arose. On the great and most solemn days of the Christian year some of the scenes of the sacred story were enacted. There were mystery, morality, and miracle plays. The great Passion Play at Ober Ammergau is a magnificent survival of what was attempted in many places in former days. But the earlier plays were performed in the churches. There were serious and less serious

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presentations of the leading facts and incidents in the sacred story. The first were mainly religious tragedies. The awful scenes of the Agony, the Betrayal, the Trial, and the Death of our Lord were enacted. But there were other representations which might be called almost comedies. At some festivals a frolicsome spirit was allowed—certain buffooneries were permitted in the pieces played. The fate of some of the adversaries of the faith was exhibited in laughter-provoking fashion. In the carved woodwork of our cathedrals we find grotesque scenes which may be reminiscences of these. Below the seat of one of the stalls in Ripon Cathedral there is a carving which represents a man seated in a wheelbarrow and grasping a bag. It is Judas Iscariot, still clutching his gains, being wheeled off to his doom. Thus this lighter element mingled with the severe in the Church plays of the Middle Ages.

By degrees a change took place. The dramas were no longer played in church. This was the first step towards a freer treatment of subject. As long as the play was represented in church the subjects were necessarily limited, and the methods of treatment were obliged to conform to certain current orthodox conceptions. Once re-



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moved from the sacred buildings a wider range of subject and a freer rendering became possible. But the religious character of the dramas did not disappear all at once. This was partly due to the popular taste, which then delighted in the religious plays to which people had been accustomed, and partly also to the fact that the conduct of the plays was in the hands of the religious orders. Thus we find one religious order, who occupied the Hospital of the Trinity outside the gate of St. Denis, gave on certain fête days representations of the Passion and the Resurrection, and of the scenes of Heaven and Hell.

Out of these mystery and miracle plays there developed the regular drama. Out of the moralities, as they were then called, sprang allegorical representations. Out of the gay buffooneries grew farces. The piece known as the "Jeu de Saint Nicolas" was the precursor of "Polyeucte."

What was true of France was also true of England. In our own country also the mystery or miracle plays were the forerunners of the drama. They were popular here in the twelfth century. The aim of these plays was instruction. A certain lesson or fact of the faith was

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put vividly before the people. These were usually derived from the Old or New Testament. The great festivals fixed, as it were, their own subjects. At Easter time it was the Resurrection. "After the third lesson on Easter Day there was a procession to the choir, in which was enacted a colloquy between the Apostles and the Holy Women." The Apostles meet the three Marys coming from the sepulchre.

The Apostles ask :	Say, Mary, say What thou sawest in the way.
The First Mary.	The sepulchre of living Christ, The glory of Him who is uprist.
The Second Mary.	The angel witnesses, I ween, The raiment that had usèd been.
The Third Mary.	Christ is risen, hope to me ; He goes before to Galilee.

These answers bring before us some of the smallest details of the Resurrection. The people learn that the women saw what the Apostles missed. The audience is carried back to the empty sepulchre, the napkin and the linen cloth, and the words of the risen Christ, that He would go before them into Galilee. We trace in this embodiment of the Gospel story the wish to teach the people. Just as to-day at Ober Ammergau the desire to instruct is evident in the setting of the piece, so the old miracle or

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mystery play began with the desire to teach the people who could not read. As in Greece religious knowledge and sentiment were kept alive in the solemn Festivals of the Gods, so in the Middle Ages the leading facts and truths of the Christian faith were brought vividly before the people by the dramatic representations in the churches. It was natural, however, that this tendency to express some noble or touching story in a quasi-dramatic form should go beyond the leading incidents of the Gospel, or even beyond the Bible narrative. Accordingly, striking events in the life of some saint were treated in the same way. Professor Courthope tells us that the earliest miracle play mentioned in England dealt with the story of St. Katharine. This shows us that the range of selection was not then limited to Bible subjects. Different cities vied with one another in the splendour and elaboration of their representations. The steps by which the miracle play was transformed into the drama as we now know it were natural and simple. It is not, however, our province to trace these. It will be enough to remember that the morality play follows the miracle play. In the morality play certain Virtues were personified. The fate or fortunes of these indicated

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the supremacy of the moral law. Virtue meant strength; Vice meant weakness. As in Spenser's "Faerie Queene," Una stands over against Duessa—simple-minded faith against double-minded ways—so the conflict between right and wrong was exemplified in the miracle plays. We may recall, too, how Sansfoy, Sansloy, and Sansjoy are in Spenser's poem knights of ill. They have close ethical affinity with one another, for when faith is lost regard for law soon perishes, and finally joy departs. In a poem this allegorising is well enough. In a play it leads to lack of that vividness of treatment which is possible in plays based on character, such as those in Bible stories. Nevertheless, in treating of personified virtues the writer could deal more freely than he could with sacred characters. The morality play was thus an intermediate step between the miracle play and the regular drama. Enough has been said to show how among Christian peoples, as among the ancients, the religious sentiment led the way in those public representations out of which arose the noblest dramatic creations. The influence of religion presided over the birth of the masterpieces of poetry.

One other matter may be touched upon here.

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I throw out a thought for what it is worth. It is generally admitted that dramatic art, which attained such high levels in Greece and again in the great Western nations, never rose to any lofty range among the Roman people. Rome had no Æschylus or Sophocles. Rome had no Shakespeare or Molière. This is generally accounted for by saying that the Roman character lacked artistic imagination. But does not the cause lie deeper still? Renan has told us that of all the religions of its time the religion of Latium was perhaps the lowest. It lacked ethical force. Its religious conceptions took little or no notice of the moral condition of the worshipper. The religious man, in its view, was the man who went through the religious ceremonies with punctuality and correctness. The validity of the rite depended upon exactitude in its performance, not on cooperation of heart and soul. The conscience played no part in the matter. Ritual punctiliousness was the highest that was aimed at. If a man was embarking on some new venture, success in his enterprise was to be secured by scrupulous carefulness in the details of the ceremony. The basal character of the religion of Rome was order, exact obedience to direc-

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tions, the highest punctilio in ritual.] The Romans were a practical people. To the safety of the Republic everything else was to give way. There was little scope for the play of the deeper and more speculative emotions out of which genuine drama is evolved. We miss in Roman writers, as a rule, the vein of mystery which is so attractive in Greek and Teutonic literature. There could hardly have been a Socrates in Rome any more than there could have been a Goethe or a Shakespeare. There was a lack of what we may call the deeper qualities of spirituality in the Roman mind. The story of the soul seeking reconciliation with itself, or of the spirit striving to find some resting-place amid the perplexing problems of existence, or the vicissitudes of an inward conflict, would find few sympathisers in a people who aspired to material conquest. They had the genius of empire, but they knew little of the kingdom of the soul. They were the organisers of the world, and what they organised remains, but it was not from them that the inspiring breath of life was to come. They were borrowers in all the domains of art. For their imperial instincts and their talent for government they were indebted to themselves

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alone. The genius of poetry was not naturally theirs, neither was that of religion. They lived in a plane other than those in which imagination, aspiration, and ethical earnestness have their dwelling. Rome produced the organisation of empire, but not the inspiration of society; the organisation of public entertainments, but not the drama; the organisation of the Church, but not the inspiration of religion. One is tempted therefore to ask whether the ethical defect of the Roman character is not to some degree responsible for their intellectual deficiencies. The presence of the deeper and nobler emotions of the soul turns the thoughts of man in the direction of religion and poetry. Deficiency in moral or imaginative sensitiveness accounts for limitations in the life of a people; and the arrested development of the dramatic literature of Rome is parallel with the imperfect evolution of their religious life. The nation that delighted in chariot races and gladiatorial displays might show some sturdy practical virtues, a strong instinct of social justice, and a vigorous patriotism, but they could not evolve a tragedy like the "Prometheus," or a religion in which mystic elements had their fitting place.

[ If these thoughts are rightly based, it seems

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that we here again meet the principle which links religion and poetry together. Both arise when the soul is sensitive to the larger appeals of nature. The growth of noble drama and noble faith indicate a certain richness and depth in the soil from which they spring. The virtues of practical and every-day life may be associated with a certain shallowness of the spiritual nature. A modern novelist who has shown in his romances his insight into Italian life as well as a mastery of the details of its recent history, has told us that "the Italians have no indoors in their nature." They live on the surface, and the life which you see and meet is the whole of their life. You need never, according to this view, wish to know them better, for there is nothing more to know. A nation whose utilitarian instinct led them to give a niche to every god could never be passionately devoted to one deity as the life of their life. The aspirations of psalmist and prophet could have had little meaning for them. It is not from the lips of a Cæsar or a Cicero or even a Cato that you meet with the cry, "Thou, O God, art the thing that I long for. Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of Thee."



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Nor is it from the pen of a Roman that we get a tragedy like that of "Orestes," or a drama revealing the deeps of human nature such as "Faust" or "Hamlet."

The nations which are greatest in religion are greatest also in song. We may explain it as we please, but the peoples in whose nature the religious consciousness was strongest were those in which poetry was more widespread or reached its highest level of expression. I have already said that there may be good poetry without any religious sentiment. It would be absurd and against all fact to speak as though religion were the sole and necessary inspiration of poetry. There are many inspiring causes of song: love, patriotism, the joyous sense of things beautiful—these and many more may awaken the Muse; but a strong, healthy, and widespread religious consciousness appears to create an atmosphere in which the singing powers of men find singing natural. Poetry is like the grateful shade of trees. The shade is the more hospitable in proportion as the branches spread wide: the vigour of the branches depends upon the strength and health of the roots below. Similarly the deeper the spiritual nature of man the more forcible and various will be his powers

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of utterance. Faith is sometimes described as blind, but she has never been described as voiceless; and when we remember that the mental and moral perplexities of life are in themselves witnesses of faith, we shall not be surprised that in lands where spiritual and moral questions are not deeply felt, the poetical range should be comparatively narrow and low.

This thought leads our way to another, or rather suggests a line of illustration of the relationship between great problems and great poems. There are three powers which may evoke poetic emotions—Faith, Love, and Reason. Each of these alone is capable of awakening song. The man of faith no less than the lover sings, and the thinker will give his philosophic poem. But suppose a case where these three powers unite in the person of one who has the gift or necessity of utterance. We have illustrations of this in poems which have proved themselves to be more than the cry of one man's heart. Such a combination occurred in England in the fourteenth century, when Langland became the voice of the nation. In his "Vision of Piers the Plowman" we can trace the influence of these three powers. Faith cries aloud to God from the heart of one who loves the

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people well, and whose mind is perplexed by the moral chaos around him. The times were evil. The old landmarks were disappearing. The Church was corrupt. The rulers who ruled in high places used their influence for gain. Simony was practised. The religious orders, who in the dawn of their day had set a high standard of life and service, had fallen from their ideal. The friar was becoming a name of scorn. Knighthood had lost its knightliness. The spirit of chivalry was sick unto death. Splendour and luxury were in the homes of the rich. The poor were poor indeed. The Black Death marched from land to land. The world seemed to be given over to the power of things evil. Men began to whisper that Christ was dead. It was in the midst of such misery and perplexity as this that Langland began to sing. In the darkness, disappointment, and death which surrounded him the Vision came to him, and this was the manner of vision that came.

There is one saint whose presence was needed by all. This saint is Truth. Men are prone to live in the midst of lies and fond self-deceptions. Pilgrims have visited sacred places, but they have not found, because they have not looked

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for, Truth. But Truth, sweet and social saint, is near at hand. The simple may find it when the learned and religious professor misses it. The pilgrims of the world gather round one who says that he knows this much-needed saint. The world finds that a Plowman knows what great and wise men have never found. The Plowman found this saint easily and readily. As a clerk knows his book, so was he familiar with him. Conscience and common sense led him to the saint's abode. There Truth made the Plowman plight his troth to serve him always. For fifty years the Plowman has known this service, and has found it full of pleasure and profit. He sowed seed. He digged. He threshed. He followed now the tailor's, now the tinker's craft, but whatever he did he did what Truth bade him do, seeking Truth's profit, and he found Truth a good paymaster, paying him always his due and sometimes even more than his due. He pays promptly too, giving his men their hire at the evening and not withholding it or delaying the payment. He is meek as a lamb, too, and pleasant of tongue.

The first thing that Truth will teach men is the duty of earnest work. There must be no

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shirking. In God's world idleness is dishonour. Labour is honourable. All who are in the world are put here to contribute their share of the work needed for the maintenance of good, and progress of mankind. But alas! this is what men will not do. They idle their time. The alehouse attracts some; others make excuses: they are too weak or too ill to work. But God's benediction is on labour. Hunger is the best medicine for those who will not work. Men should learn to seek God's mercy and grace to enable them to work such works while they are here, that at the great doomsday it may be known that they have done well as was commanded.

It will be seen that here is a simple attempt to reach some principle which will be a panacea for existing evils. The poet is pained at what he sees going on around him. The nation groans under evils. There are few or none who will put forth their hand to help, but the remedy is not far to find. The truth sought by conscience and common sense will be found to supply a sufficient answer to the problems presented by the times. "Cease to do evil, learn to do well," is the motto of the poet. He becomes a sort of prophet in his time; and he is so, not

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because he tells some strange thing or deals in some mysterious prediction, but because he lays down once more a very simple and long-forgotten principle. He leads them back to Truth. Cant and Custom had led the world far from it. The higher classes, as being more the victims of the conventional life, could not see how far they had wandered. The man of the masses, the simple Plowman, less corrupted by the seductive and delusive standards of custom, is able to perceive and to help others to see truth.

The poet's message does not end with the discovery of truth. He who learns to do well must learn to do better, and he that learns to do better must learn to do best. The pilgrims must search for one who is yet higher, even for him who stands as the figure of Charity. This is Piers the Plowman. Charity or Love alone can give the needed help. Faith and Hope alone cannot meet human need. Like the wounded man in the parable, man lies helpless on the road. Faith and Hope, like the Priest and the Levite, are powerless to help, and pass by on the other side. Charity is the Good Samaritan, who ministers to the stricken man and carries him to the inn which is quaintly called *Lex Christi*,

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the Law of Christ. To realise the Law of Charity as the Law of Christ, this is to live better than well. To turn that law into loving service, that is to live best. So the poet pictures Grace setting men to work in the field of Christ.

But the foes are many, and they withstand the Plowman's work. Pride works mischief; Antichrist arises into power. The deadly sins, like giants of evil, make bitter war against the house which Piers has built. Treachery gives these enemies the advantage. Conscience is driven forth on pilgrimage, crying aloud for Grace. It is Grace which is wanted to set the world straight. It is not the knowledge of what is right. Conscience and good sense will soon discover that. What is needed is the inward inspiring energy to set men to work in the way and following of Christ. The poem ends with the cry of the distressed and bewildered world for that which alone can remedy its ills—for the Grace of God, which can transform knowledge into practice and feeble desires into consistent resolution.

Thus in Piers the Plowman we have an example of the way in which a deeply religious

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spirit, keenly alive to the evils of his times, expresses himself in verse. The intensity of the love he bears to his country, and of the confidence he has in real religion as a remedy for the evils which he deplures, and the strong sense he has of the difference between true religion and false, vibrate through the poet's utterances. We realise that it is out of the depth of religious and patriotic sentiment that the poem is born. We have before us a vivid example of the inspiring vigour of faith and love when they stir the poet's heart. We miss much of the native force of Langland's poem because his speech is unfamiliar to us ; we need a glossary for every line ; but when we place ourselves in imagination among our forefathers and picture to ourselves the riot and wassail of the wealthy houses, the leanness of cottage homes, the exactions of the friars, the worldliness of the Church, and the horrors of the Black Death, and then read Langland's words as the words that ring out in the common speech of the times, we can understand that the cry of the poet's heart found an echo in the hearts of thousands, and that the "Vision of Piers the Plowman" not only expressed the thoughts of multitudes, but prepared the minds of men to



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welcome those other voices which heralded the day of reformation.

Thus this vision shows us that, while religion has often provided the cradle for song, song as it grew in strength has in its turn rocked the cradle of some new religious movement.

## CHAPTER III

### THE GENUINE AND SUPERFICIAL RELIGIOUS ELEMENT

[WE have seen that there is an intimate connection between the dawn of poetry and the dawn of religion. The same light falls both upon faith and song, and they respond with diverse colours to the same sunbeam. But even more intimate still is the bond which binds them together. It is religion which teaches poetry how to go. Faith guides the earliest footsteps of song, nourishes her, invigorates her and finally sets her upon her own independent path.

It now becomes necessary to make a distinction without which we should pursue our way to little purpose. There may be a religious element in poetry which is formal, and this must be distinguished from what is real. The religious element is formally present in poetry

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When the poet utilises existing religious conceptions in the framework of his poem, or when he makes some religious topic its subject. When he is a man of genuine religious spirit, these formal elements become instinct with deep religious feeling. In this case both the formal and the real religious element are present. But we know well that the formal may exist without the real. The hands may be the hands of Esau, but the voice may be that of Jacob. The external frame-work, or the subject of the poem, may be religious, but the tone and spirit of it may be tame, spiritless, and conventional, with no touch or inspiration of genuine religious feeling.

Remembering this simple fact, we shall not be surprised to find that the non-religious poem may be more truly religious than the nominally religious one. The nominally religious poem in fact may be religious in form but quite irreligious in spirit. The non-religious poem may abound in happy and spontaneous utterances which show a deep, true and genuine piety. There are, for instance, some lines of that dear, tender and truly devout soul, Kirke White, which, though intended to be religious, strike one as being about as irreligious as can well be conceived.

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The poet wishes to increase our thoughts of the greatness of God, and therefore he pictures Him as placed remote from all the tumult and interest of this busy world, in a distant and passionless realm where He

Sits on His lonely throne and meditates.

But this isolation from the work of His hands and from the throbbing life, sorrow and sin of earth, does not truly elevate our thought of God at all. Separation does not constitute greatness, even as a conception; it is a thought quite removed from true and genuine religious feeling, which finds the greatness of the Father of all in His intimate nearness and constant co-operation with the worlds which He has made. The truly religious feeling feels more capacity for response to the picture our Lord gave of the Divine Being when He said, "My Father worketh hitherto and I work." Kirke White had indeed genuine religious feeling, but in the present case he was under the influence of those somewhat deistic conceptions of God which, under the guise of reverence, viewed Him as one who dwelt apart, sharing not, even if caring for, the troubles of His children.

Or to take another and very familiar example.

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Every one knows Pope's Messianic Eclogue. It is one of those pieces in which Pope allowed himself a degree of warmth which his fastidious taste usually kept in check ; but as we read it we feel that it is deliberate and careful rather than fresh and spontaneous ; the religious flavour is conventional rather than natural. He has a religious theme, but the religious feeling is more dutiful than natural.

Hark ! a glad voice the lonely desert cheers ;  
Prepare the way ! a God, a God appears ;  
A God, a God ! the vocal hills reply,  
The rocks proclaim th' approaching Deity.  
Lo, earth receives him from the bending skies,  
Sink down, ye mountains, and ye valleys rise,  
With heads declin'd, ye cedars homage pay ;  
Be smooth, ye rocks ! ye rapid floods give way !  
The Saviour comes ! by ancient bards foretold :  
Hear him, ye deaf, and all ye blind, behold !

[ There is much to be praised in this, as far as careful execution and sustained energy are concerned : but while we read we may admire, though our hearts do not respond, we recognise skill of treatment and orthodoxy of expression ; but we miss the glow of the soul, the upspringing of the well-spring of the poet's personality in the matter. It is religious thought expressed in poetry, but can one truthfully say that it reveals a religious element in the poet ? ]

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We are far nearer this in a parallel passage from Milton :

These are thy glorious works, Parent of good,  
Almighty! thine this universal frame,  
Thus wondrous fair ; Thyself how wondrous then !  
Unspeakable! who sitt'st above these heavens  
To us invisible, or dimly seen  
In these thy lowest works ; yet these declare  
Thy goodness beyond thought, and power divine.

His praise, ye Winds, that from four quarters blow,  
Breathe soft or loud ; and wave your tops, ye Pines,  
With every plant, in sign of worship wave.

But nearest of all, in touch of personal feeling on this score, are the simpler lines of a lesser poet :

But O thou bounteous giver of all good,  
Thou art of all thy gifts Thyself the crown !  
Give what Thou canst, without Thee we are poor,  
And with Thee rich, take what Thou wilt away.

It is the perfectly spontaneous natural feeling in these lines of Cowper which calls so strongly to the reader's heart. Sympathy takes the place of admiration. Whatever doubt respecting the religious element we may have felt as we read the lines of Pope and Milton, we have no doubt at all as we read Cowper's lines. The poet has a genuine longing for the God of whom he writes. The language of his heart we feel sure

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accords with the outcry of the Psalmist, "Thou O God art the thing that I long for."

The contrast of tone and feeling of which we are speaking is seen perhaps more strongly when we place side by side two passages, one from a poem on a sacred subject, and the other from a poem which makes no pretence of being religious. For this purpose I bring into juxtaposition two extracts. One is from Racine's well-known drama, "Athalie," which, as far as subject goes, must be classed as a sacred drama: the other is from "Hamlet." The portion I select from "Athalie" is a part of Joad's speech when he strives to rouse the ardour of religious patriotism against the rule of Athalie: he speaks with all the sanction of his holy office and with the vigour of pious ardour. This is what he says:

JOAD: Celui qui met un frein à la fureur des flots  
Sait aussi des méchants arrêter les complots.  
Soumis avec respect à sa volonté sainte,  
Je crains Dieu, cher Abner, et n'ai point d'autre crainte.  
Cependant je rends grâce au zèle officieux  
Qui sur tous mes périls vous fait ouvrir les yeux.  
Je vois que l'injustice en secret vous irrite,  
Que vous avez encor le cœur israélite.  
Le ciel en soit béni ! Mais ce secret courroux,  
Cette oisive vertu, vous en contentez-vous ?  
La foi qui n'agit point, est-ce une foi sincère ?  
Voici comme ce Dieu vous répond par ma bouche,  
" Du zèle de ma loi que sert de vous parer ?

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Par de stériles vœux pensez-vous m'honorer ?  
Quel fruit me revient-il de tous vos sacrifices ?  
Ai-je besoin du sang des boucs et des génisses ?  
Le sang de vos rois crie, et n'est point écouté.  
Rompez, rompez tout pacte avec l'impiété ;  
Du milieu de mon peuple exterminiez les crimes :  
Et vous viendrez alors m'immoler vos victimes."

It may be well to give a free translation :

JOAD: He, who can put His bridle on the sea,  
Can frustrate evil men's conspiracy :  
Submissive therefore to His holy will,  
My God I fear, and know no fear of ill ;  
Yet, Abner, thanks for this thy duteous zeal,  
Which would these perils to my eyes reveal.  
I see that wrathful against wrong thou art ;  
I see thou hast an Israelitish heart.  
Thank Heaven ! and yet this indolent intent,  
This passive virtue doth it thee content ?  
A faith which acts not, is it faith sincere ?  
Then spoken by my lips God's message hear :  
" Is this the zeal an honest soul allows ?  
Think you to honour me by barren vows ?  
Do countless offerings yield me any good ?  
What need have I of goats' and bullocks' blood ?  
The blood of slaughtered kings unheeded cries.  
Break, break your truce with these impieties !  
From out my flock these crimes exterminate ;  
Then, not till then, bring offerings to my gate."

Now turn to Shakespeare and see how he makes Hamlet plead with his mother, striving to awaken within her the sin-benumbed conscience :



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**HAMLET :** Ecstasy !  
My pulse, as yours, doth temperately keep time,  
And makes as healthful music ; it is not madness  
That I have utter'd : bring me to the test,  
And I the matter will re-word ; which madness  
Would gambol from. Mother, for love of grace,  
Lay not that flattering unction to your soul,  
That not your trespass, but my madness speaks :  
It will but skin and film the ulcerous place,  
Whilst rank corruption, mining all within,  
Infects unseen. Confess yourself to heaven :  
Repent what's past ; avoid what is to come ;  
And do not spread the compost on the weeds,  
To make them ranker. Forgive me this my virtue ;  
For in the fatness of these pury times  
Virtue itself of vice must pardon beg,  
Yea, curb and woo for leave to do him good.  
**QUEEN :** O Hamlet ! thou hast cleft my heart in twain.  
**HAMLET :** O, throw away the worse part of it,  
And live the purer with the other half, etc.

Does not every reader feel the difference ? In the one case we have language which has a measure of fervour, which expresses just what is correct and fitting ; we read ; we understand ; we may even admire ; but we are not stirred. But when Hamlet speaks we hear the voice of one whose soul is on fire. We are spectators of a soul's tragedy : the conflict between the heavenly and the earthly burns in the woman's heart, kindled into life by the magic of a genuine appeal. Can we doubt where the true religious element is to be found ? The formal religious-

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ness of the passage from "Athalie" cannot redeem it from conventional frigidity of feeling, from which the touch of intellectual ardour fails to redeem it. There is a religiousness in "Hamlet" which is wanting in "Athalie." Yet measured by form, "Athalie" is a religious poem: "Hamlet" is not. We realise at once how near we may be to heaven and yet how far away, how hard, but how vainly, the brain works under the guidance of an acquiescent orthodoxy. The lustre of reality is wanting: like the dead hide, the gloss which the warm life imparted is no longer there.

Before closing, one more illustration will be useful, as we shall not contrast passages from different writers, but note the contrasted tones of one and the same writer. We shall see the same poet in fact, first under the influence of conventional and current religious thought, and then moved by the strength of a genuine religious emotion.

The poet we select is Edmund Waller, a poet highly praised in his day. He is best known to us by his song, "Go, lovely Rose!" But if we may believe his own contemporaries, he ought to hold a much higher place in public esteem than he at present occupies. His name, said an

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enthusiastic admirer, "carries everything in it that is either great or graceful in poetry." He was the first who showed us that "our tongue had beauty and numbers in it." He was, in the view of this ardent eulogist, "the parent of English verse, to whom the English tongue owed more than the French language owed to Richelieu and the whole French Academy." This panegyric may well surprise us when we remember that it was written in 1690, *i.e.* twenty-three years after the publication of "Paradise Lost" and when "Midsummer Night's Dream" had been nearly a hundred years before the public, and when three generations of Englishmen might have read the "Merchant of Venice" and "The Tempest."

We may well be surprised at the exaggerated praise bestowed by this admirer, but he was evidently one who, like the anæmic damsel, mistakes slimness for grace, and finikin fastidiousness for good taste. The quality of Waller's mind we can gather from the subjects which he celebrates in verse. Here are some of the titles: "Of the danger His Majesty, being prince, escaped in the road at St. Andero"; "To the King on his Navy"; "Upon His Majesty's repairing of St. Paul's"; "The Apology of

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Sleep, for not approaching the lady who can do anything but sleep when she pleaseth"; "Of my Lady Isabella playing on the lute"; "Written on a card Her Majesty tore at Ombre."

But after this somewhat dilettante list, we read subjects which seem more promising. We have poems on divine subjects, Divine Love, etc., etc. We turn to these with hope. This writer of great and graceful verse will surely be able to give us something which is worthy and dignified. What theme gives greater scope for inspired imagination, or calls forth more intimate and genuine expression of the soul than that of Divine Love.

We take one or two specimens of these divine poems:

That early love of creatures yet unmade,  
To frame the world th' Almighty did persuade :  
For love it was that first created light,  
Mov'd on the waters, chas'd away the night  
From the rude chaos : and bestowed new grace  
On things dispos'd of to their proper place ;  
Some, to rest here ; and some, to shine above :  
Earth, sea, and heav'n were all th' effects of love.

And love would be return'd. But, there was none  
That to themselves, or others, yet were known :  
The world a palace was, without a guest,  
'Till one appears, that must excel the rest :

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One ! like the Author, whose capacious mind  
Might, by the glorious work, the Maker find :  
Might measure heav'n, and give each star a name ;  
With art, and courage, the rough ocean tame ;  
Over the globe with swelling sails might go,  
And that 'tis round, by his experience know :  
Make strongest beasts obedient to his will,  
And serve his use the fertile earth to till.

(Of Divine Love—Canto II.)

Hear him now as he deals with love as it is  
aroused in responsive energy in the heart that  
realises the greatness of divine love :

He that alone would wise, and mighty, be,  
Commands that others love, as well as he.  
Love as he lov'd ! . . . How can we soar so high ? . . .  
He can add wings, when he commands to fly.  
Nor should we be with this command dismay'd ;  
He that examples gives, will give his aid :  
For, he took flesh, that where his precepts fail,  
His practice, as a pattern, may prevail.  
His love at once, and dread, instruct our thought ;  
As man he suffer'd, and as God he taught.  
Will, for the deed, he takes ; we may with ease  
Obedient be, for if we love, we please.  
Weak tho' we are, to love is no hard task ;  
And love for love is all that heav'n does ask.  
Love ! that would all men just, and temp'rate make,  
Kind to themselves, and others, for his sake.

(Of Divine Love—Canto III.)

Perhaps, however, a stern theme may suit the  
poet better, calling forth his more robust  
qualities. Let us, therefore, listen to him as he

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discourses on the wholesome influences of the  
Fear of God :

The fear of God is freedom, joy, and peace ;  
And makes all ills that vex us here to cease ;  
Tho' the word, Fear, some men may ill indure,  
'Tis such a fear, as only makes secure.  
Ask of no angel to reveal thy fate :  
Look in thy heart, the mirror of thy state.  
He that invites will not the invited mock ;  
Op'ning to all, that do in earnest knock.  
Our hopes are all well-grounded in this fear ;  
All our assurance rolls upon that sphere.  
This fear, that drives all other fears away,  
Shall be my song ; the morning of our day !  
Where that fear is, there's nothing to be fear'd ;  
It brings from heav'n an angel for a guard :  
Tranquillity, and peace, this fear does give :  
Hell gapes for those that do without it live.  
It is a beam, which he on man lets fall,  
Of light ; by which he made, and governs, all.  
(Of the Fear of God—Canto I.)

We read, but we feel that we are not listening to the genuine outpouring of the soul. We are rather listening to one who is treating, as correctly as he can, an appointed theme. It is the performance of a task, and it is school-boy like in tone. The poet never rises beyond the conventional utterance of expected opinions. But we now come across a piece of genuine ore. In the midst of this waste of commonplace we meet with a true gem. It is not great ; it is not sub-

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lime; but it has the ring of true feeling. At last we feel that we can hear the man himself. He is moved as he notes (he was over fourscore when he wrote it) the ravages of time: mind and body are no longer what they once were: the storms have beaten upon the old tenement; the roof is broken in; but age has compensations and loss is not all loss: the eyes that are growing dim to outward things may be opening to higher visions, and peace comes at the close of a stormy day:

The seas are quiet, when the winds give o'er:  
So calm are we, when passions are no more!  
For, then we know how vain it was to boast  
Of fleeting things, so certain to be lost.  
Clouds of affection from our younger eyes  
Conceal that emptiness, which age descries.  
The soul's dark cottage, batter'd, and decay'd,  
Lets in new light thro' chinks that time has made.  
Stronger by weakness, wiser, men become,  
As they draw near to their eternal home.  
Leaving the old, both worlds at once they view,  
That stand upon the threshold of the new.

We can forgive, perhaps, the conventionalisms in the foregoing "divine" poems which he inflicted on us after reading these last lines. Here nature speaks, and as she speaks the poet makes us one with himself. Sharers of the weakness of common humanity, we share with

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him the hope that there is a light which God brings at evening, and which atones for the days of darkness, even though they may have been many. But it is not the mere sentiment which appeals to us. It is the genuine feeling which inspires it. The heart lies open to the heart; and our nature responds to what is natural.



## CHAPTER IV

### EDMUND SPENSER

It has always been my conviction that every English-speaking child should be brought up on Spenser. The "Faerie Queene" offers good, wholesome, and acceptable mental food for the child's mind. The richly imaginative qualities of the poem, its romantic adventures, its high chivalrous feeling, appeal to the unspoilt heart and unbroken fancy of childhood. Moreover it is allegory, and childhood delights in allegory. There are some who think that children love the story and ignore the meaning of allegorical works. I do not believe it. I believe that the very thing which appeals to the child is the mingling of story and significance. The story appeals to the imagination. In this all are agreed; but children delight in acting everything they see or hear. There is in them a passion for self-identification with whatever appeals

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to them. They will play grandfather or grandmother. They will act out the heroic story, as Coleridge did Leander's swimming of the Hellespont. The joy of the allegory or the story with a meaning is to them in the thought that the story is theirs, and can be acted. To say "Quorum pars magna fui," is always a joy; and a feeling akin to this is evoked in the child-mind by the allegory. Jack may fight the giant killer; and every boy who hears the tale realises that he is Jack and that the giants are to be met with in life. The "Pilgrim's Progress" is not a sealed tale to children. With a subtle consciousness of larger meanings the child appropriates to itself the opportunities and adventures of the story. Apollyon may be met on the road of life: and the sword of God may be in everybody's hand. There are strange anticipations of life's more serious conflicts which visit the hearts of the young and awaken within them a kind of soul-foretaste of the conflict which is to be. We are often over-fearful about a child's comprehension. A child loves to be talked to as if it could understand. "I always liked him," said a clever and well-known lady, speaking of a friend of her family, "I always liked him because when I was a child he spoke to me

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as if I were grown up." A child hates to be talked down to. In the "Faerie Queene" there is none of this: there is story; there is variety of adventure; there is the richness of imagery, and the suggestiveness of a personal experience which children delight in. It teaches without appearing to teach: its ethical force is pervasive: but it does not obtrude itself as the moral frequently does in the didactic tale. Where the purpose is too obvious the child suspects that the incidents are fitted to the moral. So little is this the case in the "Faerie Queene" that it has been disputed whether we ought to consider it as a religious poem. Professor Courthope, while holding the balance between those who regard Spenser as a great religious teacher, and those who treat the religious aspect of the poem as so much loss, yet thinks that art, not religious teaching, was foremost in Spenser's thoughts and intents. There is truth in this. No one can read and enter into the spirit of the "Faerie Queene" without feeling that Spenser delighted in his art: he evidently loved it as his mistress, and followed its behests right worshipfully; but he had clear thoughts and ardent feelings concerning religious and moral life: he understood the perils on one side or the other through which

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England had passed and was passing ; he saw and approved the solution of religious difficulties towards which England was tending : he fervently believed that truth was worth following and worth fighting for ; and he trusted that under the guidance of Elizabeth, his Gloriana, his country would find the way to truth and freedom ; what he felt and believed he longed to make others feel and believe. But he was no preacher ; he was no professional teacher : he was a poet, and the patriotic thoughts and ethical feelings which belonged to him and to his countrymen blended naturally with his poetic feeling, and kept company with him in his imaginative excursions. He was so far an unconscious religious teacher that he did not think of writing any didactic poem ; he gathered into his poem the noble thoughts and the moral aspirations which, as a pure-hearted man of the age of Elizabeth, he cherished, but when he wrote it was his poem which filled his mind ; and he joyed in his art as a craftsman who loves his craft and does not think of the purchaser or the public.

But, perhaps for this very reason, he is a powerful religious teacher. The most effective teaching is that which does not proclaim itself

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as teaching, which sheds light not on its own ability, but on those things which need to be made clear. He is ever the best teacher who makes his pupils forget the teacher and the teacher's desk, because he enables them to see for themselves the lesson he would have them learn; he reveals knowledge, but he does not obtrude himself. His teaching power lies in the fact that he creates sympathy between the mind and the truth he wishes to make clear. He illumines all else, while as a teacher he is unnoticed. It was to the moral and spiritual uplifting which came to him through Spenser's poem, and not to any formal didactic quality, that Milton alluded when he spoke of him as a greater teacher than all philosophers. He did not mean, I imagine, to attribute to Spenser the deliberate intention of being a poetical pedagogue; he only meant that he had learned much from Spenser. Spenser appealed to him, aroused, kindled, dilated his soul; and he acknowledged the debt, he recognised a master in one who was certainly no intentional moral philosopher.

In this sense, and in this sense only, we may regard Spenser as a religious teacher. He is one whom we may the more fitly study, for he

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does not belong to the class of writers who are moralists of set purpose, and who distinctly and chiefly set before themselves a religious aim. Whatever religious conviction belonged to Spenser flowed naturally and without effort into his verse. He did not forsake the atmosphere which was congenial to him for the sake of pointing a moral. He lived and breathed in an atmosphere of imagination, of which one of the essential constituent elements was a loving reverence and right worshipfulness of spiritual chivalry. He believed in the excellence of virtue; he believed in the guidance which the living God gives to the sons of men. He knew that evil could only be vanquished by sincerity in conflict and by humbleness of faith, by the courageous man who set his hope in the living God. These were the unseen foundations of his work. Whatever he built was bound to rest upon these primary convictions. In building the fabric of his work he thought only of its structure and outline as an architect might of the beauty of his edifice, but he could not transcend or ignore the ethical limits of his nature. He is artist enough to pursue art for art's sake, but he is so much an artist that he recognises that ethic is as useful to art as oxygen to the atmosphere.

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Thus the religious element in Spenser's "Faerie Queene" is natural, not pedantically intruded; it is not an impertinent addition to his verse, but an inevitable element of his nature. His teaching is appreciated the more because he does not pose as a teacher.

Spenser died young; he was not more than forty-six years of age. It was in the year 1599, according to our reckoning, *i. e.* four years before the death of Queen Elizabeth. He was five or six years old when Elizabeth ascended the throne. Thus, during the whole of his life after infancy, he knew no sovereign but Elizabeth. She was the reigning monarch; but to him, as to many others, she was much more; she was the ideal sovereign. In his childhood he must have heard the tales of the fiery martyrdoms at Smithfield and Oxford, the sorrows and the degradations of England under the rule of Mary. He drank in with his expanding mind and growing intelligence the joy of England in the truly English Queen. As he grew to manhood he began to enter into the significance of the great struggle in which England was engaged. He saw the sinister intrigues and the powerful foes by which she was threatened. He was twenty when the Massacre of St. Bar-

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tholomew took place. He was thirty-six when the "Invincible Armada" was blessed by the Pope and launched against the shores of England. Two years later he published the first three books of the "Faerie Queene." When he was twenty-eight years of age he was disappointed in love; and for twelve years or more he remained unmarried. In 1594, however, he married a "countrey lasse" with eyes like sapphires and hair like gold; but troubles and sorrows made sad havoc in the five short years of his wedded life. The Tyrone rebellion drove him from his quiet retreat at Kilcolman; one of his children perished in the sack and burning of his house. He reached England in 1598; he only survived his escape for three months. In January 1599 he died, and was buried in Westminster Abbey. He was laid close to Chaucer.

Thus he tasted much sorrow in his short life: but the crowning thought of his mind was always England and England's Queen. Elizabeth had no more loyal or admiring subject, but genuine as was Spenser's attachment to the Queen, she was to him the representative of England, and England was the representative of a noble cause. England was defending freedom, a wholesome faith, and a sound morality.



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She strove for truth, for right, for liberty. She was called, as a knight of earlier times might have been called, to do battle for all that was fair in conduct and true in religion. To such a battle every Englishman was called in those stirring times. The foes were not only open foes who fought with weapons of war; there were subtle foes who used craft, who misled the simple-minded by speciousness and false words. There was need of a new knighthood in England then, and of this knighthood Spenser was to sing. This leads us to one merit of Spenser which has not, so far as I can gather, been sufficiently appreciated: he is the poet of a great transition. One great institution which had once embodied in itself the best, highest aspirations of men was falling into contempt. Chivalry had risen into power and influence in answer to a great need. It taught men to live for something more than self. It refined the coarseness which conquests won by brute force tend to engender; it refined because it swept away self as the end of action. The true knight showed courage on the field, but it was a courage on behalf of something higher than his own aggrandisement: his sword was to be at the service of honour, of womanhood, of faith. But

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the institution which embodied these ideas encountered the influences which bring decay. Refinement became fastidiousness; honour a matter of rules rather than an instinct of nobleness. The idea which called the institution into being was slain by its own children. The cultivated men of the age saw, though they were still enamoured of chivalry, the symptoms of its decline. The poets celebrated in verse the deeds of knightly men, but they were trying to prop up what was doomed to fall; and they had wit enough to know it. Ariosto, whom Spenser enjoyed, rejoiced in the scope which the doughty deeds of brave knights gave his verse, but he wrote with a touch of satire; he was hardly noble enough to appreciate the ideal worth of knighthood; he was too much a man of his age not to see its weakness. The pathos of the age of transition was written clear in Don Quixote; in its pages mirth is on the surface, but there is a weeping heart below. The worn out shams which the age of transition preserved so hypocritically were ridiculed by Rabelais.-Cervantes weeps over the age which is dying; Rabelais scoffs at the age which has not the courage to bury what is already dead. "Solventur risu tabulæ" is his motto. Was there

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any poet who in such an age could give to chivalrous ideas real strength and significance? Tasso attempted it, but it was impossible to evoke in the age of the Reformation the spirit of the Crusades. Men's minds had turned from the material symbols of religion to the inner spiritual meaning—from the Jerusalem below which was in bondage with her children to the Jerusalem which was above and was free and was the true Mother of all. If, therefore, chivalrous thoughts and ideas were to influence the men of the sixteenth century they must be inspired by the breath of the new spirituality. It was in doing this that Spenser succeeded. Where Tasso failed, because he sought to revivify the spirit and the forms of the past, Spenser succeeded, because he made the splendid pageantry of other days move before men's eyes full of the spirit of their own times. While Cervantes mourned a dead chivalry and Rabelais laughed at its empty forms, Spenser with a noble seriousness declared that knighthood was not dead, that all that was needed was that a reverent and magnanimous spirit should enter into the life-conflicts of the time. Men need not fight for the Holy Sepulchre, or for a discredited institution; but they still might fight

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the battle of the Cross, and find the help which truth, new discovered truth, could give. They need not fight to drive the pagan out of Jerusalem, but they might fight for the cause of faith and truth in their own land. Thus he took up the old legends of the past, the old and beautiful conceptions of a knightly life, and enriching them with his own colours, and rejuvenating them with a diviner spirit, gave them a significance fresh and fitted for the men of his own time. It has been said by an able modern French writer (Henri Martin) that the foundation thought of Rabelais' work was "a rational and tolerant Theism, opposed to a sectarian fanaticism." Spenser opposed a personal to an official chivalry, a revived faith to unintelligent dogmatism, a true Church to a decadent ecclesiasticism. He did not, like Cervantes, look back sorrowfully over what was gone; he looked forward hopefully to what was coming. In the armour of divine faith and in a renewed spirit of chivalry he wished to see men riding forth to face the future and to win new conquests on the wide fields of quick developing opportunity. He had clear convictions about religion: he had lofty ambitions for his England and for Englishmen. He took the forms of the past and used

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them to teach lessons for the present and the future. He saw that for stability of national character, love of truth, love of liberty, self-control, and genuine sincerity of heart were needed. In the combination of these and other great qualities the true chivalrous character must be known. He wished to see his countrymen renowned for the possession of characters thus noble, faithful, self-restrained, and single-minded. Though his works are such treasure-houses of lofty and varied imagination that he has been called the Poets' poet, and so rich in colouring that he has been styled (most inappropriately, as I venture to think) the Rubens of poetry, yet it is of character, strong, free, natural, faithful character, that he sings. Truth, freedom, self-control, and single-mindedness are leading features of his thought.

(1) *Truth is his theme.* Truth in a deep and large significance. Spenser longed to see young England strong, fitly equipped, wisely guided, firm in faith, and victorious. He saw in imagination the knight going out to meet adventures and to encounter his foes.

A gentle knight was pricking on the plaine,  
Ycladd in mightie arms and silver shielde.

Canto I. 1.

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The armour he wears bears marks of former fights, though he himself has not seen war before. He is the image of the young generation going forth to carry on the conflict for right and truth; and for this the old armour which has been tested in the long warfare against error and wrong is the best.

He is a true Crusader: the war upon which he goes forth is the war of the Cross. He is not going to liberate the sepulchre at Jerusalem from the power of the Pagan: he is going out as the true warrior of the Cross: he rides out redressing human wrong, and waging implacable war against the old power of evil,

Upon his foe, a dragon horrible and stearne.

Canto I. 3.

He does not travel alone—

A lovely ladie rode him faire beside,  
Upon a lowly asse more white than snow,  
Yet she much whiter.

Canto I. 4.

This is the fair lady Una, the image of Truth: for truth is one and error manifold: truth is simple and error complicated. In contrast with the simple stainlessness of truth, the ugly monster, falsehood, has no harmony of form; it is half-woman, half-beast; its tail wreathes itself

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into many folds; and out of its mouth is vomited empty and worthless learning.

Her vomit full of bookes and papers was,  
With loathly frogs and toades which eyes did lacke.  
Canto I, 20.

A sudden storm has driven the Knight and the Lady to seek for shelter, but after the shelter beneath the pleasant and varied trees, they lose their way, and wander till they find themselves close to "a hollow cave amid the thickest woods." Here lies the ugly monster of falsehood in the darkness of the cave. They have stepped unawares into "the wandering wood," and they have reached the mouth of "Error's den." Yet the glimmer of the Red Cross Knight's armour makes a faint light within the den. He vanquishes the monster; but he falls a victim to the wiles of the great enchanter, who sunders him from Una (Truth); and in her stead Duessa (Falsehood) becomes his companion. His fatal mistake comes when, after many adventures, he lays aside his armour, and drinks of the enchanted spring, whose waters rob from him his manly force—for

All that drinke thereof do faint and feeble grow.  
Book I., Canto VII, 5

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Thus disarmed and weakened, he falls under the power of the giant Pride; and is only rescued through the intervention of Una, who seeks the aid of the king of all true knights—the mysterious and faultless prince—Arthur—who holds a place in Spenser's poem half human, half divine—who is the pattern of knighthood, and who appears in the hour of need with gracious and victorious helpfulness. In the end the knight rescued by the Ideal Prince is wedded to Una. He is restored to truth by the help of one greater than himself.

(2) *Liberty is his theme.* The early life of Spenser developed in him a strong love of liberty. Not only did he drink in the spirit of an epoch when civil and religious liberty were becoming a great passion in English life: but in his boyish days he seems to have been free to ramble in the country, to taste the joy of an early friendship with trees and hills and streams. In that pleasant part of Lancashire (at least so it has been conjectured) where brilliant green and abundant foliage gathered round the spurs of Pendle Hill, he spent those days when every aspect of nature brings a new delight, provoking curiosity, holding out a challenge to courage, wearing a countenance now of



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bewitching sweetness, and now of awesome mystery. Here is the picture of that time given us by his own pen :

I went to raunge amid the mazië thicket  
And gather nuttes to make my Christmas game,  
And joyed oft to trace the trembling pricket,  
Or hunt the hartlesse hare till she were tame.  
What wreaked I of wintrie ages waste ?  
Tho deemed I my spring would ever last.  
How often have I scaled the craggie oke,  
All to dislodge the raven of her nest ?  
How have I wearied, with many a stroke,  
The stately walnut tree, the while the rest  
Under the tree fell all for nuttes at strife ?  
For ylike to me was libertie and life.

We can sympathise with a childhood thus spent, and out of which sprang the feeling that life divorced from liberty was not life at all. We can understand how the voices which were crying out for freedom in the national life, and which declared in no doubtful language their dread of foreign religious tyranny, harmonised with his own early learned lesson of the sweetness and the force of freedom.

With experience there came the recognition of the principles and conditions upon which true freedom was based. False thinking, however specious or labour-saving, could not lead to freedom. Truth alone could make men free.

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Therefore he showed to his countrymen the Red Cross Knight struggling to reach truth, escaping from false semblances, wearing that armour of the soul whose head-piece was faith, whose breastplate was righteousness, and whose girdle was the girdle of truth. He rejoiced, thinking no less of his country than of the human soul, to tell how the adventurous knight at length was wedded to Una, how kingly hands wrought in the wedding ceremonies and customs, and how wondrous heavenly music stole forth upon the air and filled the hearts of all who heard it with indescribable and rapturous peace. A "heavenly noise" was heard to sound throughout the palace,

Yett wist no creature whence that heavenly sweet  
Proceeded, yet each one felt secretly  
Himselfe thereby reft of his senses meet,  
And ravished with rare impression in his sprite.

"Faerie Queene," Bk. I. (xii. 39).

(3) *Self-control is his theme.* Freedom is not possible to the passion-led man, however accessible to him intellectual truth may be. Truth properly understood means truth in the inward parts, and there is no true freedom where there is no self-control. Put in another way, religion, which must ally itself with truth, must also, if it

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is true religion at all, show itself in a true life. Therefore the legend of Sir Guyon, or of Temperance, follows the story of the Red Cross Knight. The Cave of Mammon, the grim foe Maleger, and the temptations of Acrasia, find place in the adventures of Sir Guyon. The temptations of the world, the devil, and the flesh, must be faced and fought. There is no escape: honour is not for him who boasts of unreal victories: the true man does not covet undeserved honours, nor claim the credit of victories which have never been won.

The scorn of knighthood and trew chevalrye,  
To thinke, without desert of gentle deed,  
And noble worth, to be advanched hye:  
Such prayse is shame; and honour, vertue's meed,  
Doth bear the fayrest flowre in honourable seed.

“Faerie Queene,” Bk. II. (iii. 39).

The conflicts therefore are real: it is no sham enterprise upon which the true knight sets forth: a real battle must be fought before self-control is won; and significantly enough Sir Guyon loses his sober comrade and counsellor, the dark-robed Palmer, when with Idleness for his companion he travels across the lake in the boat that needs no oars. To follow indolence is to lose the way, which is open only to self-mastery.

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(4) *Singlemindedness is his theme.* Spenser does not lose sight of another aspect of the soul's freedom. The true self-control cannot be won without conflict; nevertheless no mere conflict confers true spiritual freedom. The use of external means of self-mortification does not bestow power to subdue the carnal nature, and certainly cannot confer upon man that freedom which can come from within only. Spenser sees this very clearly, and stalwart as he is in his picture of the deadly fights in which the knights of Christ must bravely take their part, he teaches no less the deep and perpetual truth that true liberty, like life, must develop from within. He sets this forth when he speaks of beauty. He has a love of beauty perhaps unequalled among English poets. True beauty is to him a worshipful, a divine thing. He knows that it may be prostituted and misused, but he has no puritan disdain of it. Like all things which can give joy and delight to human life, it is a God-sent gift; and in its most abiding and most fascinating manifestation it is the expression of a beauty which is within. His conception is that where the true soul is, it has the power of expressing itself in beautiful form. Therefore the more of the heavenly there is in man, the

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more fair must he grow in outward seeming.  
So he writes in his "Hymne in Honour of  
Beautie" :

I that have often proved, too well it know,  
And who so list the like assayes to ken,  
Shall find by tryall, and confesse it then,  
That Beautie is not, as fond men misdeeme,  
An outward showe of things that only seeme.

. . . . .

Behind the outward show "there is a heavenly fire and force which survive when the red and white of cheek and lips have faded" : there is a celestial seed of beauty.

It is heavenly borne and cannot die,  
Being a parcell of the purest skie.

In proportion to the purity of the soul is its power of robing itself in beautiful form.

So every spirit, as it is most pure,  
And hath in it the more of heavenly light,  
So it the fairer bodie doth procure  
To habit in, and it more fairly dight  
With chearefull grace and amiable sight ;  
For of the soule the bodie forme doth take ;  
For soule is forme and doth the bodie make.

## CHAPTER V

### MARLOWE'S "FAUSTUS"

THE closing years of the sixteenth century were years of national excitement in England. They were stirring times which appealed to the heart of every patriot; they were years of that experience of adventure and peril which do so much for the bracing of character and the consolidation of national life. In 1577 Drake in his little vessel, the *Pelican*—a ship of only one hundred tons—sailed through the Straits of Magellan; he passed into the Pacific, and as he went gathered treasure from defeated Spanish vessels, and rounding the Cape of Good Hope finally returned to England after a three years' voyage, the first seaman who had circumnavigated the globe. The massacre of St. Bartholomew in France had in 1572 startled Europe, and had filled all Protestant people with alarm. Fifteen years later the great scheme for the

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invasion of England called the country to arms. The vast Armada was known to be ready to sail. Against England, English faith and English freedom, a powerful confederacy was engaged. England had to rely upon herself and upon herself alone. Drake sailed forth and burned the Spanish store-ships; he had, as he expressed it, singed the King of Spain's beard. The following year the great Armada appeared off the shores of England. It was a time to test the courage, the resolution, and the self-reliance of the Queen and her people. And Englishmen rose to the emergency. At sea the English ships harried the Spaniards; and the winds finally scattered the great fleet. Out of 120 ships only 54 returned. On land the spirit of the people was animated by high courage and dauntless determination. They looked up to the God who commanded the winds and the waves; they also girded themselves with indomitable energy and inflexible resolution to hold with both hands the liberty and the homes which they loved. It was an age to breed men, and the manly spirit of the times speaks in deep tones which vibrate through the literature of the period. Its writers are imbued with a love of freedom, but they show also a deep reverence

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for the laws of the world in which they live. The splendour of physical laws, and the ethical helpfulness of moral laws in the formation of character are dear to them. We see tokens that these men realise that they live in a world of moral order. The recognition of this does much to strengthen the faith and invigorate the character. The moral ideals which were prevalent, like the hardy circumstances which tested our countrymen, conspired to form men of virile type. Man was man and master of his fate. He did not live in a world of caprice, but in a world so ordered that energy of character and inflexible resolution of will could achieve great things.

It was in this vigorous and masculine age that Christopher Marlowe was born and educated. He was born in 1564; he was consequently about eight years of age when the massacre of St. Bartholomew took place; he was sixteen when Drake returned from his voyage round the world; he was twenty-three when the great Armada was talked about, and the great dread of invasion fell upon England. About the same time he became famous through the success of his first play, "Tamburlaine the Great." The interest of this play is two-fold. It marks the early vigour of Marlowe's genius, and it



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marks a new departure in dramatic literature; or the first time blank verse was heard on the stage. The play vibrates with national feeling. The great pulse of the English people then throbbing with patriotic emotion makes itself felt in the poet's verse. Tamburlaine is the vigorous and resolute Scythian chief who revolted against the power of Persia, and strong in his self-reliant courage was ready to withstand the world. It was produced at a fitting moment. England was awake to the European combination which threatened her. England could rely only upon herself. The story of the resolution which would face all odds was a story calculated to appeal to English sentiment. "Tamburlaine" hit the English feeling, as the saying is, "between wind and water." It introduced a daring experiment which gave the poet greater freedom of expression, and it awakened the sympathetic feeling of the people. The widening world of which Drake had reminded Englishmen, the possibility of finding spoil and glory beyond the seas, these are thoughts to which Marlowe can give expression and be sure of winning the applause of his countrymen.

Lo ! here, my sons, are all the golden mines,  
More worth than Asia and the world beside ;

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And from the Antarctic Pole, eastward behold  
As much more land, which never was descried,  
Wherein are rocks of pearl that shine as bright  
As all the lamps that beautify the sky!  
And shall I die, and this unconquered?  
Here, lovely boys; what death forbids my life,  
That let your lives command in spite of death.

"Tamburlaine the Great," Pt. ii. Act v. sc. 3.

These words of Tamburlaine echo the active and even buccaneering spirit which animated so many Englishmen at the time. The spirit of adventure and courage, stimulated by extravagant fancies of rich harvests of spoil, is the spirit to which "Tamburlaine" gives expression. But he realises that behind this brave and adventurous spirit, there must be a firm and resolute will; it is neither a mere romantic sentiment nor a transient and hot-headed courage which will achieve; it must be the fixed and calm spirit which recognises that through danger lies the road to success.

Oft have I levelled and at last have learned  
That peril is the chiefest way to happiness,  
And resolution, honour's fairest aim.

"The Massacre at Paris," Act i. sc. 2.

Parallel are the lines in "Tamburlaine."

Nature that framed us of four elements,  
Warring within our breast for regiment,  
Doth teach us all to have aspiring minds.

"Tamburlaine the Great," Act ii. sc. 7.

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In such passages as these, we hear words which echo the strong national courage and determination which distinguished Englishmen of the Elizabethan age.

But there is another characteristic of the poet which seems to separate him from the normal Englishman of his age. He has a touch of unscrupulous craft about him. The Englishman of the sixteenth century took a delight in the wild recklessness of the sea-dogs of the time. To take life in hand, and to rush thoughtlessly through perils, to conduct war in the spirit of the buccaneer, suited the temper of men to whom adventure and the play of courage were a sort of birthright. But though this spirit sometimes betrayed a rough unscrupulousness, it was far removed from the cold and cruel cunning which sets aside all moral considerations at the bidding of policy. It was a rough age in which men dealt blows and expected them; but there was a difference between the dagger and the poison. The Englishman would have no hesitation in striking down his foe; but the tales of secret poisoning which were whispered in Italy were seldom told of English life. The social morality might not be high, but it had a rough straightforwardness, and the raw material of its

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conscience had some notions about fighting fair. Here England drew back from Italian influences. The great moral power which the religious reformation had organised wrought in men's minds a profound distrust of a culture which was divorced from ethics. The renaissance in a sense helped the reformation, but as the reformation revived the conviction that religion was personal, it was impossible that it could remain in perpetual alliance with an unethical intellectualism. The time of the parting of the streams had come. The men of extremes did their best to hasten the separation. The cultivated son of the renaissance worshipped intellect, culture, refinement, and the more these could be emancipated from reverence and godly fear the more desirable did they seem in his eyes. Such a spirit alienated many pious souls from the new learning; and as a result the reactionary came to regard all culture, art, and intellectualism as unclean and irreligious. The world beheld in Italy the cultivation of knowledge and the patronage of art allied with debauchery and religious unbelief; it beheld in England a puritanism which viewed art, taste and refinement as an accursed thing, which destroyed what was beautiful in the name of

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God, and what was elevating in the name of morality.

No writer was more intensely hated by the Puritans than Christopher Marlowe. We can hardly be surprised at it. It may be true enough that his enemies did not scruple to blacken his memory with impossible stories of his excesses and immoralities ; but there was a strain in his character and thought which provoked resentment, and which showed a disregard for the ethical restraints. Marlowe was an Englishman, but he was an Englishman who had imbibed a strong taste for Italian ideas. He had a love for Italian modes of thought and some admiration for Italian methods and morals.

He introduces Machiavelli to speak the Prologue to "The Jew of Malta." Machiavelli assures the audience that he is not dead, though the world believed him to be ; his soul had flown beyond the Alps. He admits that he may be an unwelcome visitor in the eyes of some.

To some, perhaps, my name is odious.

He flouts the old saws and maxims which were based on the conviction that there was a righteous law of retribution operative in the world.

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I count religion but a childish toy,  
And hold there is no sin but ignorance.  
Birds of the air will tell of murders past.

But he only alludes to this old saying to sneer  
at it.

I am ashamed to hear such fooleries.

A man has a right to take and to get what he  
can. His knowledge and his capacity are the  
measure of his right. His success is his suf-  
ficient justification.

Many will talk of title to a crown.  
What right had Cæsar to the Empire?  
Might first made kings, and laws were then most sure,  
When like the Draco's they were writ in blood.

Did Marlowe personally endorse this unscrupulous teaching, or was he only writing as a dramatist? There can be little doubt that whether or not he endorsed the demoralising policy which he puts into Machiavelli's mouth, he has a kind of fascinated admiration for the character which is strong enough to adopt it. The man to whom he pays his most frequent homage is the strong all-daring man who is ready to win power at any cost. Force, courage, craft, bribery, let all be employed so long as power is gained.

The policy which set aside all ethical con-

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siderations had a fascination for him. The strong and resolute character which could tread down misgivings and ignore conscience as readily as it could face obstacles, and thrust aside everything rather than forego its end, was the character which appealed to his sympathy. The lust of power conjoined with a resolute will is seen in Tamburlaine. Guise in "The Massacre at Paris" consoles himself that he holds all the cards in his hand: he can shuffle them at will: no scruple need stand in his way; he has used all men and their convictions to promote his ambition: he need not play fair, but he will play for success.

Then, Guise,  
Since thou hast all the cards within thy hands,  
To shuffle or cut, take this as surest thing,  
That, right or wrong, thou deal'st thyself a king.

"The Massacre at Paris," Act i. sc. 2.

In his "Faustus" this resolute disdain of right, this irreverent ambition of power reaches its climax. If through Mephistopheles he can win power, then he will buy Mephistopheles.

Had I as many souls as there be stars  
I'd give them all for Mephistopheles.

Act i. sc. 3.

This last-named play is the play by which

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Marlowe is best known; and rightly so, for it is undoubtedly his finest work. In the estimation of Professor Courthope, "It is one of the greatest plays that the world possesses." ("History of English Poetry," vol. ii. p. 410.) It is a play which appeals strongly to radical human nature; it touches the deeper and more mysterious powers of the human soul.

The interest which is awakened by Faustus largely turns on the struggle which takes place in the soul of Faustus. On one side Faustus is captivated by the ambition of power: he is ready to part with anything to secure it: there need be no scruple concerning the price paid; but on the other side, there are moral misgivings which make themselves felt. The fascinations of knowledge and power are not powerful enough to subdue the spiritual capacities altogether or to silence the divine voice within the soul. Marlowe is no longer the disciple of the reckless, half or wholly atheistic spirit which came from Italy. The religious consciousness asserts itself. This is perhaps partly due to the Teutonic character of the subject which he has selected. The legend of "Dr. Faustus" is, as has often been pointed out, the creation of the Teutonic mind. It could hardly have originated among the Latin



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ances. But Marlowe is not merely carried away by the necessity of his subject: as he writes, a force stronger than the renaissance influence reasserts itself, the native moral consciousness awakes in him and overruns the shallow affectations of the Italian cultivation which he had adopted. Certainly we breathe in "Dr. Faustus" an atmosphere very different from that which meets us in "Tamburlaine" or in "The Jew of Malta." The story is a story of a soul-struggle. The evil and the good contend not only for man, but in him. The will may choose the evil or the good, but the voice of good will not be silent. Three times do the good angels appear, making appeal to Faustus to pause in his downward course.

Faustus is tempted by the dream or desire of power. He has attained a high reputation for his skill and learning in theology.

Excelling all and sweetly can dispute  
In heavenly matters of theology.

But the empty glory of such a reputation does not satisfy his restless thirst for power: he wishes to wield these strange and secret powers which will bring monarchs and forces of nature under his control.

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FAUSTUS (*speaks*): All things that move between the  
quiet poles  
Shall be at my command. Emperors and kings  
Are but obeyéd in their several provinces,  
Nor can they raise the wind or rend the clouds;  
But his dominion that exceeds in this  
Stretcheth as far as doth the mind of man;  
A sound magician is a demi-god;  
Here tire thy brains to gain a deity.

Act i. sc. 1.

In this soliloquy we hear the voice of the renaissance spirit. Marlowe had deeply drunk into this spirit. The age was inquisitive of knowledge: enlarged powers and widened domains of investigation were at men's command. The religious movement which had produced so profound a spiritual and moral revolution among the Teutonic races had not made much progress in Italy: there the spirit of culture seemed to ally itself with a defiant libertinism and a wilful unbelief. The Italian tone of thought had, as we have seen, attracted Marlowe. The resolute soul, which spurned everything sacred in its passionate lust of power, fascinated him. And in a degree, he makes such a spirit speak in Faustus. He desires to rival great Cornelius Agrippa, the marvellous magician whose fame had become a proverb. He

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Will be as cunning as Agrippa was,  
Whose shadow made all Europe honour him.

Act i. sc. 1.

But the poet cannot picture Faustus as untouched by moral consciousness. The keen sense of the sanctity of the individual soul, and of the responsibility for the exercise of the will, which the reformation movement had deepened in men's minds influences him. Faustus does not pass into the power of evil without warning. While he reads the book of fatal knowledge, his good angel appears.

GOOD ANGEL : O, Faustus, lay that damnèd book aside,  
And gaze not on it, lest it tempt thy soul,  
And heap God's heavy wrath upon thy head !  
Read, read the Scriptures :—that is blasphemy.

But the evil spirit too is at hand, to hold up to his imagination the glittering picture of power.

EVIL ANGEL : Go forward, Faustus, in that famous art  
Wherein all Nature's treasure is contained :  
Be thou on earth as Jove is in the sky,  
Lord and commander of these elements.

Act i. sc. 1.

In other words the evil spirit argues as the serpent did in the garden—"Ye shall be as gods"; but the prospect held before Faustus is more than that of knowledge; it is power, god-like power, which is set forth as the temptation.

## Marlowe's "Faustus"

As yet Faustus has not summoned Mephistopheles to his side: he is still only studying the black art. In the second act, he has moved many steps downward. He has used the fatal charm, and has formally called upon the infernal powers: he has seen and been startled by the hideous form of Mephistopheles: he cannot bargain with him in his native ugliness: he bids him go back and change his shape: he will feel easier in dealing with him, if he will only keep up the appearance of religion. There is a profoundly human touch, conjoined with biting contemporaneous satire, in Faustus' command:

Go and return an old Franciscan friar ;  
That holy shape becomes a devil best.

Act i. sc. 3.

If there is in the scene a flavour of the reckless and defiant irreligionism of the renaissance, there is also the confession that a man set upon evil would often fain deceive himself that he is not wholly bad. Yet the awful sense of the doom which he has invoked is present with him.

FAUSTUS : Now, Faustus,  
Must thou needs be damned : canst thou not be saved ?  
What boots it, then, to think on God or heaven ?

Now go not backward, Faustus, be resolute.

## The Religious Spirit in the Poets

Why waverest thou? O something soundeth in mine ear,  
Abjure this magic, turn to God again.

Act ii, sc. i.

While he is debating, the good angel draws near, and pleads.

GOOD ANGEL: Sweet Faustus, leave that execrable art.

It is characteristic that Faustus knows well that the way of return is through sorrow for sin and faith in God's help.

FAUSTUS: Contrition, prayer, repentance—what of these?

GOOD ANGEL: O, they are means to bring thee unto heaven.

But Faustus has blunted the edge of his religious trust, and he is open to the suggestion of the evil angel who, as before, accompanies the good.

EVIL ANGEL: Rather illusion, fruits of lunacy,  
That make men foolish that do trust them most.

GOOD ANGEL: Sweet Faustus, think of heaven and heavenly things.

EVIL ANGEL: No, Faustus, think of honour and of wealth.

Act ii, sc. i.

The value of spiritual things seems small to the demoralised understanding. Faustus can grasp powers which will make him secure and place him out of the reach of God's hand.

## Marlowe's "Faustus"

FAUSTUS : When Mephistopheles shall stand by me,  
What power can hurt me ? Faustus, thou art safe ;  
Cast no more doubts.

Act ii. sc. 1.

So thrusting aside the holy misgivings, which are the promptings of the higher nature, he moves downwards once more.

Faustus has not yet signed the fatal bond, which, signed in blood, pledges his soul to the Evil One ; but this crisis in the play is reached immediately after Faustus has cast away his doubts. He summons Mephistopheles. The Evil One appears. A formal deed of agreement is drawn up. By it Faustus is to enjoy twenty-four years of well-nigh limitless power through the service of Mephistopheles. To sign the deed Faustus pricks his flesh ; the blood, however, as though reluctant to take part in the hateful compact, congeals before he can finish his signature. Mephistopheles is obliged to find coals to warm and melt the congealing blood. Thus another fatal downward step has been taken : but though thus far committed by his deed the hour of grace has not ended. Still to the almost doomed man the good angel comes.

Faustus now endeavours to encourage himself with the idea that there is no hell.

## The Religious Spirit in the Poets

FAUSTUS : Come, I think hell's a fable.

MEPHISTOPHELES : Ay ! think so still, till experience change thy mind.

Act ii. sc. 1.

Mephistopheles is an outspoken spirit ; he resorts to no evasions : he does not conceal from Faustus the awful reality of the underworld. On the other hand when Faustus speaks of heaven, Mephistopheles disparages its happiness : it holds less attraction than earth or that which Faustus has within his power. Thinking however of the possible joys of heaven, Faustus hesitates : he will repent and abjure magic. While in this mood the good angel visits him.

GOOD ANGEL. Faustus, repent ; yet God will pity thee.

Act i. sc. 2.

Now, however, the evil angel raises the paralyzing argument of despair. Faustus has gone too far : he has passed beyond God's power to help : he has acted of his free will as a spiritual being, and by his own deed he has placed himself outside the reach of heavenly help.

EVIL ANGEL : Thou art a spirit, God cannot pity thee.

But Faustus will not accept this argument.

## Marlowe's "Faustus"

FAUSTUS : Who buzzeth in mine ears I am a spirit ?  
Be I a devil, yet God may pity me,  
Yea, God will pity me, if I repent.

EVIL ANGEL : Ay, but Faustus never will repent.

Act ii. sc. 2.

This touches a line of argument which Faustus feels is based upon truth.

FAUSTUS : My heart is hardened : I cannot repent.

He cannot think of spiritual things without hearing the voices of despair louder than those of hope. He will give up, he will summon to his aid invincible resolution—

Faustus never shall repent.

Yet with the natural inconsistency of those who are proud of their own resolution, Faustus throws the blame of his fate upon Mephistopheles.

'Tis thou hast damn'd distressed Faustus' soul.  
Is't not too late ?

Act ii. sc. 2.

The evil angel is at hand to echo his thought, and speaks the fateful word, "Too late."

But it is not too late : the good angel has not forsaken Faustus, and speaks the higher truth.

GOOD ANGEL : Never too late, if Faustus will repent.



## The Religious Spirit in the Poets

In answer the evil angel seeks to rouse terror  
in Faustus' soul :

EVIL ANGEL : If thou repent, devils will tear thee to pieces.

GOOD ANGEL : Repent, and they shall never rase thy skin.

It is the last effort : the good angel parts from him, and he goes through his course of the reckless enjoyment of power, till the hour of doom comes ; and then alone, as one who stands at the foot of an unscaleable precipice facing the inexorable sea, Faustus counts the fast passing minutes, which like the incoming waves bring near the moment of doom.

FAUSTUS :                      Oh, Faustus,  
Now hast thou but one bare hour to live,  
And then thou must be damn'd perpetually !  
Stand still, you ever-moving spheres of heaven,  
That time may cease, and midnight never come.

Act v. sc. 4.

But the midnight draws near fast. The relentless clock tells the swift flight of time. He shrinks from the thought of the interminable hell before him. If torment could but be measured by time, he would be content, or if he could surrender the priceless and awful inheritance of the soul and be as the soulless beasts that perish ! He envies the dumb creatures that know not the awful horrors of which

## Marlowe's "Faustus"

spiritual beings are capable. If he could but be transformed to such, it would be joy.

Ah ! Pythagoras' metempsychosis,  
Were that (but) true, this soul should fly from me,  
And I be chang'd into some brutish beast !  
All beasts are happy.

Act v. sc. 4.

Then as the hand creeps over the dial towards the midnight hour he curses the day of his birth, his parents, and yet realises that the blame of his doom is not with them.

No, Faustus, curse thyself, curse Lucifer,  
That hath deprived thee of the joys of heaven.

Act. v. sc. 4.

The clock strikes and in the midst of thunder and lightning Faustus is borne away by the infernal powers.

The changeless principles of moral order find vigorous and inevitable expression in the play. The poet makes us realise the sanctity of the individual, the mysterious power of the human will, the inward wrestling between the good and evil impulses which form part of the soul's experience. The sin of Faustus is not merely the sin of the adventurous soul, which like Prometheus would seize upon knowledge so as to pluck from heaven new benefits for men: the sin is

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the selfish sin of the man who longs for power that he may please and glorify himself; who plays with unlawful forces and sacrifices the best spiritual capacities of his nature for the sake of present power. Character is offered upon the altar of selfish ambitions; and in aggravation of this sin, the tender voice of the restraining and guiding spirit of all good is silenced. He sins, but he sins against light and knowledge: he sins most of all in that he quenches the spirit of God within his heart.

Thus the writer who perhaps more than any other had imbibed the spirit of the godless Renaissance shows himself a child of Teutonic thought, and bears witness in his greatest play to the moral and spiritual forces which are in constant operation in the souls of men and are indispensable for the preservation of society and civilisation.

## CHAPTER VI

### SHAKESPEARE'S "TEMPEST"

THERE is one of Shakespeare's plays which exerts a unique fascination over certain minds. It is hardly true to say that it is quite unlike the other plays, but in a way it stands alone. It is "The Tempest." It is printed first in most editions of Shakespeare; but it would be nearer chronological accuracy to print it last. It was not published till 1623; it can hardly have been written before 1610. It was probably written for the Princess Elizabeth's wedding in 1613. Looked at from the standpoint of Shakespeare's own experience, it is a poem produced when the stress and excitement of life's work is over. Shakespeare was then a man of means, he did not need to write for bread, or for necessity, or to supply plays to keep the theatre going. He was about to move away from London. Faith-

## The Religious Spirit in the Poets

ful to the green fields and pleasant trees and red-tiled houses of Warwickshire, he will seek quiet among his native meadows. What he writes he writes as one whose fancy is free and whose judgment is matured. His genius may fulfil itself. Shakespeare less than most men was the victim of tyranny in his work. His strength was perhaps never wholly swept away by the imperative necessity of producing something. But, nevertheless, there were times in which he made up his plays because they were wanted; and we feel the difference between the work so produced and the work of happy, unfettered spontaneity. "The Tempest" is wholly spontaneous. It is more; it has an inevitableness about it. It awakens a feeling analogous to that which the "Ancient Mariner" produces. There is a sense of life—human life—in it. It is bright, and full of atmosphere. It has, of course, none of the gaunt weirdness of Coleridge's poem; it is not severe in structure; a fairy sky is over all the scenes. But it is full of a deep and noble seriousness. It has been called his farewell to art, but one is tempted to ask whether it might not also be called Shakespeare's confession of faith. For without once spoiling the brilliant and magic colouring

## Shakespeare's "Tempest"

with which he has invested his work he sets forth a noble ethic of human life. The whole play presents to us a blending of supernatural agencies with human affairs, and yet these supernatural agencies are not, like those employed in "Hamlet" and "Macbeth," outside the will of the actors, they are represented as wholly within the control of Prospero, the banished Duke. The law of fatal retribution is seen to be within the grasp of a kindly power. The purpose of the moral law is not bare retribution, but retribution working for man's education.

The human characters have all the variety of human life. There is the man who has suffered by the treachery and cruelty of his brother. There is the successful traitor, Antonio, whose heart is ready still for schemes of treachery, and who would fain tempt Sebastian to murder King Alonso and seize the crown of Naples. There is dear, kind-hearted, garrulous Gonzalo, the faithful courtier, with a good heart and a tongue that is content to run on talking foolish nothings if only to distract the grief of his master, the king, and who with quick thoughtfulness strives to shield him from all unkindness. Hence his rebuke of Sebastian—

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- My Lord Sebastian,  
The truth you speak doth lack some gentleness  
And time to speak it in : you rub the sore,  
When you should bring the plaster.

Act ii. sc. i.

Then there are the servants of the exiled Duke. Caliban, the hewer of wood and drawer of water, the creature who, earthly in taste and temperament, will only work under compulsion or the fear of pain. There is Ariel, who with occasional gusts of sulky petulance is yet being educated to a state in which freedom is possible. There are the sensual, pleasure-loving servants of the court, Trinculo and Stephano, content to be thought great by a degraded thing like Caliban. Finally, there are the young people in whose happiness the story is to find its culmination.

These are some of the characters ; they present a typical group. It is the world which is here. In it are gathered the men who are satisfied with material enjoyment, who are restless and uneasy, plotting for power or station which heaven has withheld from them ; the men of lower and the men of higher aims, of base or noble views of life. We meet the possessors of ill-gotten gains, the sufferers from the world's injustice, the quiet fidelity of age, the unfulfilled yearnings of youth. The stage here is a microcosm.

## Shakespeare's "Tempest"

In the development of the play the powers of nature take their part. Storm and tempest, thunder and lightning, the yawning sea and the jagged rocks are encountered; and in the development of the play the desire and ambition of each man is made manifest. Life is a great revealer of character. It comes to every man and it says: "Now will I search this man's heart of what sort it is: I will prove it and find out its god." And the proving often shows what pitiful things are the gods men worship.

Let us look at the revelation of hidden gods made in "The Tempest." Caliban's god is the man who can give him drink. Stephano, the drunken butler, has command of the bottle; therefore Caliban will give him worship. Trinculo the jester is not "valiant," and is not worthy of homage, because he does not give him drink. "How does thy honour?" says Caliban to Stephano. "Let me lick thy shoe. I'll not serve him [Trinculo], he is not valiant!" And in more brutally direct fashion, Caliban avows the reason of his homage—

These be fine things, an if they be not sprites.  
That's a brave god and bears celestial liquor.  
I will kneel to him.



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I'll swear upon that bottle to be thy true subject : for the liquor is not earthly.

Hast thou not dropp'd from heaven ?

Act ii. sc. 2.

There is no reticence, no affectation of concealment here. The liquor is pleasant ; this is the divine thing ; the bearer of such must be a god from heaven. Such is the thought of the lowest creatures. The god worshipped by them is a low god, because their tastes are low. We know that the worship of those whose god is their belly can hardly be an elevated worship.

Higher, because involving more intellectual interest and effort, but not one whit more heavenly, is the worship of the ambitious conspirators. They are ready to sacrifice honour for gain. The successful conspirator who has seized upon his brother's dukedom shows how far gone is his moral degradation when he complacently declares that his treachery has brought him nothing but good.

SEBASTIAN : I remember  
You did supplant your brother Prospero.

ANTONIO : True :  
And look how well my garments sit upon me ;  
Much feater than before : my brother's servants  
Were then my fellows ; now they are my men.

SEBASTIAN : But, for your conscience ?

## Shakespeare's "Tempest"

ANTONIO: Ay, sir; where lies that? if 'twere a kibe,\*  
'Twould put me to my slipper: but I feel not  
This deity in my bosom: twenty consciences,  
That stand 'twixt me and Milan, candied be they  
And melt ere they molest!

Act ii. sc. I.

Antonio's mind is so full of the advantages which a little energetic treachery may win that he can thrust all conscientious misgivings aside. So he seeks to drive away every scruple from Sebastian's mind, and to encourage him by a bold stroke to secure the crown of Naples. Sebastian's brother, the king, is asleep and at their mercy. Let him strike one blow and the crown will be his. So Antonio plies his arguments.

Here lies your brother,  
No better than the earth he lies upon,  
If he were that which now he's like, that's dead;  
Whom I, with this obedient steel, three inches of it,  
Can lay to bed for ever; whiles you, doing thus,  
To the perpetual wink for aye might put  
This ancient morsel, † this Sir Prudence, who  
Should not upbraid our course. For all the rest,  
They'll take suggestion as a cat laps milk;

---

\* A kibe is a chilblain. Antonio means, If it were a thing like a chilblain, it would so far put me to inconvenience that I should have to wear an easy shoe to avoid the fret. But conscience does not even give him so slight an uneasiness.

† Gonzalo, the faithful and talkative old counsellor who lies asleep near the king.

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They'll tell the clock to any business that  
We say befits the hour.

SEBASTIAN :                    Thy case, dear friend,  
Shall be my precedent ; as thou got'st Milan,  
I'll come by Naples. Draw thy sword.

Act ii. sc. 1.

The god of Antonio is power and success. He is kept back by no moral reverence, by no divine principle of honour or of right. He judges that the consciences of the crowd are much like his own : they will be content to follow the successful and the strong, acquiescing in any suggestion as a cat laps milk.

So the play reveals the gods which the baser sort of men worship. Prospero's nature is raised above these low worships. He has always had a fondness for books. Even when the ducal crown of Milan was on his brow, he loved his library. Perhaps his studious ways had drawn him too much from public affairs. But now after his years of exile in the enchanted island he takes large and well proportioned views of things. He sees that the world's possessions are less than nothing and vanity, but he does not disdain existence or declare that it is not worth having ; he perceives that the deeper significance of life can only be realised by those who have right notions of its purpose. Life does not con-

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sist in the abundance of things which a man possesses; it consists in moral worth or character, and the value of living must be measured by its power to develop character and invigorate moral worth. We see the kind of worship which such a view of life involves. The man who understands that moral worth is the true worth of life has grasped the foot of God, and is not far from the kingdom of heaven.

We shall now draw out the views of Prospero by references to the play.

First, then, Prospero realises the emptiness of the outward pomp and glory of human life. He uses words often quoted, which are like a magnificent paraphrase of the repeated cry—vanity of vanities : all is vanity.

PROSPERO (*to FERDINAND, after the little pastoral masque has been played*) : Be cheerful, sir.  
Our revels now are ended. These our actors,  
As I foretold you, were all spirits and  
Are melted into air, into thin air :  
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,  
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,  
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,  
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve  
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,  
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff  
As dreams are made on, and our little life  
Is rounded with a sleep.

Act iv. sc. i.

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But though these magnificent edifices and splendid piles melt into nothingness, life is not nothingness. Life may be like a dream, so soon passeth it away and we are gone : but life is real, and it affords to all men noble opportunities of becoming morally stronger and better men. Prospero uses Ariel to conjure up the storm and the shipwreck which follows it. To those who see, like Miranda, and to those who, like King Alonso and his companions, experience the tempest, the raging of the sea and the roaring of the thunder are very terrible. To Prospero who has aroused the storm, the storm is a pageant, unsubstantial as the gorgeous palaces and solemn temples which fade away. He reassures Miranda that the terrible scenes which wrung her young heart with agony and pity were but transient visions, working no real harm.

MIRANDA : O, I have suffered  
With those that I saw suffer : a brave vessel,  
Who had, no doubt, some noble creature in her,  
Dash'd all to pieces. O, the cry did knock  
Against my very heart. Poor souls, they perish'd.

PROSPERO : Be collected :  
No more amazement : tell your piteous heart  
There's no harm done.

Wipe thou thine eyes ; have comfort.

## Shakespeare's "Tempest"

The direful spectacle of the wreck, which touch'd  
The very virtue of compassion in thee,  
I have with such provision in mine art  
So safely ordered that there is no soul—  
No, not so much perdition as an hair  
Betid to any creature in the vessel  
Which thou heard'st cry, which thou saw'st sink.

Act i. sc. 2.

The storm, like the splendour of the world, is a mask, but it is a mask which, like life, covers a meaning. Its meaning is discipline, moral education. The men who are exposed to the terrors of the tempest and are flung shipwrecked upon the island are being brought through experiences which are a spiritual training. The better nature in some of these men is slumbering. It needs must be awaked. Life may be vanity, a dream, a nothingness, but its inner significance is very real: it is a dream which can teach the soul. Life and its storms may soon be over, but while they last they may be God's storms. Life is never so unreal that a man may not find something divine in its tempests—"All thy billows and storms," said the Psalmist, "have gone over me." Life may be a pageant, but it is not an empty pageant, if the education of the soul is remembered and realised. This moral education holds a foremost place in Prospero's mind. These careless, treasonable men must be brought

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to a better mind. No man is worth the possession of life without life's discipline.

The experience of the storm and of the island brings awakening of soul to these evil men. In one part of the island they find, as they follow the enchanted music, a banquet spread. They are about to eat, when Ariel, disguised as a harpy, appears amid thunder and lightning, and as the banquet vanishes from before their hungry eyes, Ariel addresses them :

You are three men of sin, whom Destiny,  
That hath to instrument this lower world  
And what is in't, the never-surfeited sea  
Hath caused to belch up you : and on this island  
Where man doth not inhabit ; you 'mongst men  
Being most unfit to live. I have made you mad ;  
And even with such-like valour men hang and drown  
Their proper selves.

*[Seeing them draw their swords.*

You fools ! I and my fellows  
Are ministers of Fate : the elements,  
Of whom your swords are temper'd, may as well  
Wound the loud winds, or with bemock'd-at stabs  
Kill the still-closing waters, as diminish  
One dowle that's in my plume : my fellow ministers  
Are like invulnerable. If you could hurt,  
Your swords are now too massy for your strengths,  
And will not be uplifted. But remember—  
For that's my business to you—that you three  
From Milan did supplant good Prospero ;  
Exposed unto the sea, which hath requit it,  
Him and his innocent child : for which foul deed

## Shakespeare's "Tempest"

The powers, delaying, not forgetting, have  
Incensed the seas and shores, yea, all the creatures,  
Against your peace.

The only way in which escape from this retri-  
butory wrath may be had is through repentance  
and amendment of life—

Nothing but heart-sorrow  
And a clear life ensuing.

Act iii. sc. 3.

The condition of the wrong done is forced  
deep into the mind of Alonso. All along he has  
been uneasy: he has seen in the tempest and in  
the disappearance of his son Ferdinand the token  
of Heaven's wrath.

ALONSO: O, it is monstrous! monstrous!  
Methought the billows spoke and told me of it;  
The winds did sing it to me, and the thunder,  
That deep and dreadful organ-pipe, pronounced  
The name of Prosper: it did bass my trespass.  
Therefore my son i' the ooze is bedded, and  
I'll seek him deeper than e'er plummet sounded  
And with him there lie mudded.

GONZALO: All three of them are desperate: their great  
guilt,  
Like poison given to work a great time after,  
Now 'gins to bite the spirits.

Act iii. sc. 3.

But not only upon men who have been guilty  
of misdeeds must life's discipline fall. It is true



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that Nemesis brings retribution for wrong and Nemesis is part of life's discipline; but trial, apart from all thought of retribution, is part of life's discipline and needful for moral strength. He has no real moral fibre to whom things have come too easily. We never value life's privileges and life's goods till we have had to pay for them. Therefore, not only the criminals whose wrongdoings call for retribution, but the innocent and untried son of the king must be brought to the test of labour and suffering. From this true point of view Ferdinand, son of King Alonso, is the hero of the piece. He is brought safe to land. He sees Miranda and he is delighted with her and her beauty. But the sagacity of Prospero will not allow the young man an easy triumph. Even though his heart rejoices in the mutual love of Ferdinand and Miranda, his prudence will not allow his daughter to marry one who has not stooped to bear the common yoke of life's labour and pain. Sunny and rainless skies do not breed hardy plants. Luxurious and easy lives mean too often weedy moral natures. Therefore Ferdinand must meet difficulties—must know hard work and fear, the discipline of service and the consciousness of the presence of some one stronger than himself. He

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must feel the unescapable force by which frail men are surrounded and under which they have to labour. This is all the more necessary if Ferdinand is to wed Miranda, Prospero will not give his daughter to an untried man. He realises that the young people are attracted by one another.

PROSPERO : At the first sight  
They have changed eyes.  
They are both in either's powers; but this swift business  
I must uneasy make, lest too light winning  
Make the prize light.

Act i. sc. 2.

Acting on the policy here expressed, Prospero speaks roughly to Ferdinand, accuses him of being a spy, sent to win the island from the lawful owner: threatens to manacle his neck and feet together and make him live on the coarsest fare: by his enchantment reduces him to utter powerlessness, and then sets him to hard labour in carrying logs. Ferdinand stands the testing well: his is a large magnanimous nature, free from vulgar egotisms.

FERDINAND (*bearing a log*): There be some sports are  
painful, and their labour  
Delight in them sets off: some kinds of baseness  
Are nobly undergone, and most poor matters  
Point to rich ends. This my mean task  
Would be as heavy to me as odious, but

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The mistress which I serve quickens what's dead  
And make my labours pleasures :

. . . . . I am in my condition  
A prince, Miranda . . . . .  
. . . . . and would no more endure  
This wooden slavery than to suffer  
The flesh-fly blow my mouth . . . . .  
. . . . . for your sake  
Am I this patient log-man.

Act iii. sc. 1.

Prospero sees that Ferdinand is made of good material and puts an end to his labours.

PROSPERO : If I have too austerely punish'd you,  
Your compensation makes amends, for I  
Have given you here a thrid of mine own life,  
Or that for which I live ; who once again  
I tender to thy hand : all thy vexations  
Were but my trials of thy love, and thou  
Hast strangely stood the test.

Act iv. sc. 1.

Meanwhile the discipline of the wrong-doers has been going forward. The King Alonso, Sebastian and Antonio had all had a hand in dispossessing Prospero of his dukedom. Antonio and Sebastian bear the additional guilt of having plotted on the island against the life of King Alonso. All three have endured a strange imprisonment, and have been smitten into a sort of powerless dismay of their own wrong-doing. The spirit of repentance is working in them.

## Shakespeare's "Tempest"

How deeply is told by Ariel to Prospero in the Fifth Act.

PROSPERO: How fares the king and 's followers ?

ARIEL: Confined together

In the same fashion as you gave in charge,  
Just as you left them ; all prisoners, sir,  
In the line-grove which weather-fends your cell ;  
They cannot budge till your release. The king,  
His brother and yours, abide all three distracted,  
And the remainder mourning over them,  
Brimful of sorrow and dismay.

Act v. sc. 1.

The pitiful spectacle of these three self-reproachful men ; miserable, because now morally awake, works upon the shallow nature of Ariel.

ARIEL: Your charm so strongly works 'em  
That if you now beheld them, your affections  
Would become tender.

PROSPERO: Dost thou think so, spirit ?

ARIEL; Mine would, sir, were I human.

PROSPERO: And mine shall.

Hast thou, which art but air, a touch, a feeling  
Of their afflictions, and shall not myself,  
One of their kind, that relish all as sharply,  
Passion as they, be kindlier moved than thou art ?  
Though with their high wrongs I am struck to the quick,  
Yet with my nobler reason 'gainst my fury  
Do I take part: the rarer action is  
In virtue than in vengeance: they being penitent,  
The sole drift of my purpose doth extend  
Not a frown further. Go release them, Ariel:

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My charms I'll break, their senses I'll restore,  
And they shall be themselves.

Act v. sc. I.

It needs very little reflection to see the strong religious element running throughout the play. It is, of course, in no sense scientific theology. That is the last thing which we should expect. But, nevertheless, there are certain noble and broad lines of religious teaching set forth by the poet, and the principles of which we catch a glimpse are those which are closely allied with the very fundamentals of all sound theology. Thus one principle is: The nature of man bears witness to his need of an object of worship. Every man has a god or makes a god for himself. The being which seems most capable of satisfying his desires is for the moment accepted as his god. Caliban finds his god in Stephano, because Stephano can give him such divine liquor. The second principle is that there is that in man which sooner or later awakens or is awakened to dissatisfaction with the gods of his own choosing. There is a moral nature in man which is the very power by which he is able to discriminate between the higher and the lower. \* This moral nature often slumbers, because man awake to the love of ease or the love of power

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has not had his moral nature aroused. The third principle is that life brings experiences which are calculated to arouse the dormant moral nature. The fourth principle is that when once this moral nature is so aroused that it becomes the ruling and directing power of life, then one great stage of man's development has been reached. Translate this into the language of formal theology, and we only affirm that though men are made in the image of God, yet they go after other gods, worshipping full often the works of their own hands. But in the pursuit of unworthy gods there is no satisfaction for one who is made for the worship of the true God, and man sooner or later is wakened up to the consciousness of his own moral weakness, and at the same time to the worthiness of right, and to the enduring power of all that is holy and good. Or treat the matter as a growth. Man first seeks what seems to satisfy. His only idea of a god is of one upon whom he can depend for sustenance and satisfaction. But soon the necessity of a moral affinity between man and his God makes itself felt. Man cannot worship save where he can render moral homage. Man needs a righteous God, and with such a one he must enter into fellowship. The knowledge of

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righteousness means for the awakened man his power of self-disapproval, and the power of self-disapproval means the wish to unite with higher life, for an advance into loftier moral regions, for a continuous elevation of character. When this desire for progress in righteousness is secured, all is well. The goal may not be reached, but the goal is seen and aimed for, and man is measured by what he aspires after—

They being penitent,  
The sole drift of my purpose doth extend  
Not a frown further.

Thus the play is a play of moral awakening. The guilty men realise their guilt; the whole company see the world with larger and clearer vision than before. Even degraded Caliban has been awakened from his idea that Stephano is a god—

What a thrice-double ass  
Was I, to take this drunkard for a god,  
And worship this dull fool!

Caliban too, perhaps, best phrases the moral of this awakening—

I'll be wise hereafter  
And seek for grace.

Act v. sc. 1.

How many of us have taken some besotment for

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a god, and worshipped some dull folly of self or worldliness! Let us be wise hereafter and seek for grace. If Caliban, who stands at the lowest stage of development as Prospero stands at the highest, could "be wise hereafter," there is hope for all. The most degraded who awake and seek for grace may reach that harmony with God's order which gives freedom and power over Nature.



## CHAPTER VII

### MILTON'S "COMUS"

IN popular estimation Milton would be called a religious poet. The theme which he treats in his two longest poems is a theme of religion. It is the story of "Paradise Lost" and "Paradise Regained." It would be expected, then, that to these great poems we should go in investigating the religious element; but, for reasons which I have explained, it seems to me well to avoid those poems which are religious in form. In such the religious element may be found, but, as a rule, it is not found so spontaneously as in the poems which are not religious in subject. Milton, of course, is not as Waller and Racine. It can hardly be said of these last named that they were men of strong or convinced religious temperaments. Milton, on the other hand, was a man saturated with religious thoughts, and subjected to deep

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religious convictions. God was a great reality to him; justice, righteousness, faith in large principles of toleration and charity were dear to Milton's soul. He had his weaknesses and inconsistencies; but he believed in great and noble principles of right. He had the courage to withstand the men of his own side when he saw them sinning against these principles. He could discriminate because he was true to his principles when other men were blind. He hated Laud's prelacy and the tyrannous priestcraft which he believed to be its accompaniment, but he saw that priestcraft was not confined to one form of Church government, and he hated the tyranny of Presbyterian intolerance, and had the courage to point out that new "presbyter" might be old "priest" writ large. Milton was a great man, not great in gifts alone, but great because he held his gifts and used them in a large and lordly fashion: he was king over his own thoughts, a master in his own house; he yielded subjection to no man, because devotion to what he believed to be true had made him free from the servitude of men and parties. [He believed that the honest and simple-hearted spirit might entertain the highest for its guest. The light of God and the vision of God was for

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the pure and humble men of heart.] No one can doubt the personal, moral sincerity of the opening invocation of "Paradise Lost." As we pass from the ground of Biblical allusion to the spiritual prayer of the later lines we become conscious of a deepened throb of the poet's heart. His genius writes the earlier lines; his soul is in the later. He invokes the aid of the divine muse :

Sing, Heavenly Muse, that on the secret top  
Of Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire  
That shepherd who first taught the chosen seed  
In the beginning how the heavens and earth  
Rose out of Chaos : or, if Sion hill  
Delight thee more, and Siloa's brook that flowed  
Fast by the oracle of God, I thence  
Invoke thy aid to my adventrous song.

But what a touch of personal solemnity is laid upon the prayer which follows :

And chiefly Thou, O Spirit, that dost prefer  
Before all temples the upright heart and pure,  
Instruct me, for Thou know'st : Thou from the first  
Wast present, and, with mighty wings outspread,  
Dove-like satst brooding on the vast Abyss,  
And mad'st it pregnant : what in me is dark  
Illumine, what is low raise and support.

The interest of this quotation lies, however, not only in the witness which it bears to the spiritual sincerity of the poet, but also in the

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expression which it gives to one great truth which the poet held with much tenacity. It is the truth which contradicts the empty adage, "Art for art's sake." In Milton's view the powers of life gain in depth, force and range in proportion as the soul of man is ethically sincere; the spirit which can elevate and illumine man's powers finds its way to the heart which is upright and pure. The moral sincerity of the man is a real factor which makes the vigorous use of his powers increasingly easy. Moral force conditions mental force. A clean heart often means a clear vision. This question is not one into which we can enter here. It is important, however, to remember that it is not settled by citing the examples of loose-living poets who wrote more elevating poetry than some strictly moral poets could have produced. Nobody denies that Byron was a greater poet than Kirke White or Pollock. We may even admit that sometimes the very restraints of conscience may have robbed certain poets of a freedom which less scrupulous men possessed. The question is like one of sanitation. The change from a bad system to a good may work injuriously on the lives of a few; but the broad fact remains that in the long run the good system is preservative

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of human life. There may be men who reach their best in unwholesome conditions or lose their lives by being deprived of the evil conditions to which they have become accustomed; but we have very little doubt for all that, about the general laws which govern human health and well-being. And in the same way we have very little doubt that where the soul is morally sincere the gifts of brain have freest play. And certainly the witness of the highest ranges of Olympus goes that way. Milton has no doubt of it. He feels that gifts are God's; they are to be used for high and noble ends; his power to achieve these ends depends upon the aid of a divine spirit, and for the helping advent of that inspiring visitor there is needed an honest and good heart.

This conception of the power which accompanies goodness is dear to Milton. It is a religious thought, and it holds an emphatic place in "Comus"—a poem not religious in structure or form.

"Comus" is a Masque or Masquerade. It is a slight play in which the actors appeared in masks. It consists of a little more than a thousand lines. The plot, if we can call it such, is very simple. A lady and her two brothers lose

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their way in a wood. The two brothers leave their sister in order to recover the track. During their absence Comus, the ill-conducted reveller, who haunts the wood, discovers the sister where she had been left. Comus is a master of sorcery, and is bent on bringing all whom he meets under the yoke of a riotous life, and to this end does not scruple to use his magic arts. He can establish his sway over any one who will drink of the enchanted cup he offers. Against his blandishments and flatteries the sister is firm. Finding himself baffled in his endeavour to make the lady drink of his cup, Comus resorts to the use of his magic wand. He cannot conquer her will, but he can paralyse her action. By his enchantments the lady is

In stony fetters fixed and motionless.

But though thus spell-bound at his will, he is impotent in his persuasions. She still retains her will to resist him and still refuses to drink the cup of his enchantment. Guided by a good spirit who is the guardian angel of the piece, the brothers arrive while Comus is urging his last persuasions. Comus flies, but the lady is still the victim of his spells and remains chained to her chair. The enchanter has taken his magic

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wand with him. To release the lady, the aid of the nymph Sabrina is sought; the lady is released, and the mask ends with an epilogue spoken by the attendant or guardian spirit.

The play illustrates the power of simple-hearted virtue. The lady is left alone; her brothers, her natural protectors, are no longer at her side. She encounters the evil genius of the world, the heedless, pleasure-loving, magic-gifted Comus. But powerful as he is and able to restrain her action, he is powerless against the firm will and the clear insight which a pure heart possesses. It is the wide and lucid vision of the pure soul which is perhaps chiefly dwelt upon by the poet. He puts into the lips of the lady the words of celestial wisdom; she shows a power of perception which belongs only to the pure-hearted, and it is her pure-heartedness which makes her put aside the magic cup. She thus escapes degradation.

The power of the enchanted cup which Comus offers is such that it transforms those who drink it. He offers

to every weary traveller  
His orient liquor in a crystal glass,  
To quench the drouth of Phœbus; which as they taste  
(For most do taste through fond intemperate thirst)  
Soon as the potion works, their human count'nance,

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The express resemblance of the gods, is changed  
Into some brutish form of wolf or bear,  
Or ounce or tiger, hog, or bearded goat.

This idea of human beings so transformed belongs to the folk-lore of the ancient world. Ovid has incorporated in his "Metamorphoses" many of these old stories. He tells how Cadmus was metamorphosed into a serpent, Actæon into a stag, Io into a heifer, Daphne into a laurel, Hyacinthus into a flower, Egeria into a fountain, the Cercopians into apes. The idea therefore of men and women being transformed into creatures of a lower order was a familiar one. It would take too long to enter into a discussion of the origin of this idea. It expresses, however, a certain great moral truth. Men may lose the characteristics of their dignity and superiority. They may lose what is specially their glory. They may sink below the level of their order. Nebuchadnezzar falls and takes his place among the beasts of the field. Man being in honour abideth not, but becomes like the beasts that perish. It is a curious modern comment or illustration of this ancient belief that the records of lunacy tell us that inmates of asylums sometimes exhibit a tendency towards animalism, or imagine themselves to be metamorphosed.



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The insane have fancied themselves to be animals or to be fragile vases which stood in imminent peril of being broken. One lady was known who believed herself to be a teapot, and stood with her arm looped to her side, like the handle of the teapot, and so waited "to be poured out." Thus insanity produces the sense or fancy of a deteriorated order. A mad idea that they are or wish to be some lower creature possesses the insane. Is there not a symptom of this in the petition of the Gadarene demoniac, "Suffer us to enter into the swine"?

Thus the fact of human deterioration towards animalism is a commonplace of all literature, ancient and modern, sacred and profane. The interpretation, however, of the fact is not always the same: and it is the different ethical conception entertained by the classical and the Christian poet respectively which is full of suggestion.

This difference is marked in two ways. The causes of the transformation are different, and so are the results.

In Ovid the transformation is generally due to some inevitable circumstance. The victim acts in ignorance and finds to his dismay that he has unwittingly been guilty of some desecration or violation of divine order. Actæon is changed

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into a stag by the indignant goddess Diana, because by accident he chanced to see the goddess bathing.

Actæon was the first of all his race,  
Who grieved his grandsire in his borrowed face ;  
Condemned by stern Diana to bemoan  
The branching horns and visage not his own ;  
To shun his once-loved dogs, to bound away,  
And from their huntsman to become their prey,  
And yet consider why the change was wrought,  
You'll find it his misfortune, not his fault ;  
Or, if a fault, it was the fault of chance ;  
For how can guilt proceed from ignorance ?

Ovid, *Metam.*, Book iii. 188-198.

(Addison's Translation.)

Aglauros turned to a statue may indeed be reckoned to be punished for her petulance and jealousy, and Ocyrrhoe for presumptuous reading of the future ; and Battus for his double-dealing is transformed into a touchstone. But the moral causes of the transformation do not hold a conspicuous place in the poet's thoughts. Like so many of the ancients, misfortunes are to him mainly the work of the gods whose tempestuous quarrels are unwittingly interfered with by mortals ; and these unhappy mortals, being involved in celestial disputes of which they know nothing, are made the victims of celestial malignity.

In Milton we reach a purer ethical idea. To

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drink of the cup of Comus is fatal; the terrible Nemesis overtakes those who share it; but those who drink, do so with their eyes open, moved by their own uncontrolled thirst or tempted to a reckless act by heedless love of pleasure.

Most do taste through fond intemperate thirst.

The man who has accustomed himself to self-control, will not drink; the man of selfish pleasure-loving nature succumbs to the temptation: he may blame the tempter afterwards, but he ought rather to blame his own self-indulgent habits which left him unarmed against temptation. One recalls the Apostolic precept: "In your faith, supply virtue, and in your virtue, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control" (2 Pet. i. 5, 6).

The effects, as well as the causes, of the transformation as treated by the heathen and Christian poet respectively show significant differences.

The victims of Circe's enchantments are still men, though they wear the form of brutes. They are victims and they are miserable victims; because they remember what they once were. In fact they are men in feeling, though beasts in form.

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The comrades of Ulysses visit the fatal palace  
of Circe—

Before the spacious front, a herd we find  
Of beasts, the fiercest of the savage kind.

But though thus in outward form they are  
wild and fierce beasts, they prove to be mild and  
amiable creatures, that seem to seek aid from  
the visitors.

Our trembling steps with blandishments they meet,  
And fawn, unlike their species, at our feet.

The reason of this contradiction between the  
outward form and the disposition shown by the  
beasts lies in the fact that they are human beings  
imprisoned in strange animal forms, longing to  
be released from their loathsome imprisonment.  
This is made quite clear when the comrades of  
Ulysses themselves fall victims to the enchan-  
tress. Circe comes ;

Entering, she greets us with a gracious look,  
And airs that future amity bespoke,  
Her ready nymphs serve up a rich repast,  
The bowl she dashes first, then gives to taste.  
Quick, to our own undoing, we comply ;  
Her power we prove, and show the sorcery.

Soon, in a length of face, our head extends ;  
Our chine stiff bristles bears, and forward bends ;  
A breadth of brawn now burnishes our neck :  
Anon we grunt as we begin to speak.

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Ulysses arrives and with his drawn sword compels Circe to undo the charms. The victims resume their human shape, and shed tears of joy and gratitude for their deliverance.

With tears our weeping gen'ral we embrace ;  
Hang on his neck and melt upon his face.

Ovid, *Metam.*, Book xiv. 220-244.  
(Garth's Translation.)

Under Milton's treatment the effects of the enchanted cup are very different. They are alike in metamorphosing men into animals, but according to Milton the metamorphosis only extends to the face.

Their human countenance,  
The express resemblance of the gods, is changed  
Into some brutish form . . . . .

All other parts remaining as they were.

It is the human face divine which is lost by drinking of the fatal cup ; and it is the human power of sitting in judgment upon self which is parted with at the same time. They are not alive to the horror of their own transformation. Unlike the victims of the classical Circe, they do not resent their degradation.

And they, so perfect is their misery,  
Not once perceive their foul disfigurement,  
But boast themselves more comely than before.

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This is a more fatal fall than any pictured by Ovid. To be miserable is sometimes the surest evidence of greatness, just as pain may be a symptom of life; but to be content in degradation, proud of self in it, is to fall below manhood indeed; it is the triumph of animalism. And this is the most exquisite penalty which can meet man: to be a fool and yet to think oneself wise: to be a hypocrite and yet to think oneself sincere. Plato pictured these influences when he showed how youth, growing up under the severe *régime* of an old oligarchy, was tempted to the opposite extreme of self-indulgence. Arrogant reasonings, he tells us, prohibit the ambassadorial admonition of individual old men. The rising generation scorn such counsel. "As for modesty, they call it stupidity, and thrust it out into disgraceful exile, while temperance they call unmanliness, load it with abuse and then expel it; and as for moderation and decent expense, they persuade themselves that they are nothing else but rusticity and illiberality, and banish them from their territories, with many other unprofitable desires . . . Having emptied . . . the soul thus held by them . . . they next introduce with encomiums and false eulogies indolence and anarchy, extravagance and shamelessness, call-

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ing insolence, good breeding; anarchy, liberty; luxury, magnificence; and impudence, manliness." ("Republic," Book viii. c. 13.) This is the picture of young men degraded and yet proud of their degradation and blind to their shame.

Similarly, in Milton's thought, those who drink of the fatal cup lose moral ambition. All the nobler elements of their nature are forgotten. They remember no more the glory of their ancestors, and the high ideals of life which once were before them. They are as those who, having tasted of the fatal lotus flower, forget the errand upon which they were bound, and the heavenly lineage which obliged them to live for lofty things; they perceive not their degradation, they forget their high origin and their lofty destiny, they

Boast themselves more comely than before,  
And all their friends and native home forget  
To roll with pleasure in a sensual sty.

In writing this Milton follows Homer, who told the story of the lotus eaters, the lotophagi, to whom Plato refers in the passage we have cited:

They eat, they drink, and nature gives the feast:  
The trees around them all their food produce:  
Lotus the name: divine, nectarious juice!

## Milton's "Comus"

(Hence called lotophagi); which, whoso tastes,  
Insatiate riots in the sweet repasts,  
Nor other home, nor other care intends,  
But quits his house, his country and his friends.

*Od.*, ix. 104-110.  
(Pope's Translation.)

To drink of the cup of Comus, or to take the lotus fruit, brings the fatal penalty of forgetfulness of all the higher aims of life; it is to drop lower in the scale of being, and not to know that we have fallen: it is to be, in Scriptural language, no longer "alive" to the true meaning and value of life. This fall does not come at once. With plausibility and subtlety it comes. The cup which degrades is in the hand of the enchanter. It looks innocent enough at the beginning. There can be no harm in pleasure. Were we not made for joy? Do not these gifts of nature bring joy? Let us take what comes with easy heart and be glad! But at the last there comes the serpent bite; or worse still a slow paralysis of the moral sense creeps over us; conscience does not respond to the appeals of right or goodness. Those who live in pleasure are dead, though they may seem to live. It is against the fatal seductiveness of a life divorced from all moral considerations and high spiritual ambitions that Milton protests in his "Comus."



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He could feel the seductiveness of the fatal charm. He could give vigorous utterance to the enchanter's persuasion. Sour old age is out of the way, why should not youth enjoy itself?

Rigour now is gone to bed ;  
And Advice with scrupulous head,  
Strict Age, and sour Severity,  
With their grave saws, in slumber lie.  
We that are of purer fire  
Imitate the starry quire.

Or listen to the reasonings of Comus when he tries to persuade the lady to drink the fatal draught :

COMUS: Why should you be so cruel to yourself,  
And to those dainty limbs, which Nature lent  
For gentle usage and soft delicacy ?

Scorning the unexempt condition  
By which all mortal frailty must subsist,  
Refreshment after toil, ease after pain,  
That have been tired all day without repast,  
And timely rest have wanted.

O, foolishness of men ! that lend their ears  
To those budge doctors of the Stoic fur,  
And fetch their precepts from the Cynic tub,  
Praising the lean and sallow Abstinence !  
Wherefore did Nature pour her bounties forth  
With such a full and unwithdrawing hand,  
Covering the earth with odours, fruits and flocks,  
Thronging the seas with spawn innumerable,  
But all to please and sate the curious taste ?

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But all these arguments are vain to the mind  
strong in truth and constant in virtue.

LADY: Impostor! do not charge most innocent Nature,  
As if she would her children should be riotous  
With her abundance. She, good cateress,  
Means her provision only to the good,  
That live according to her sober laws.

The tempter however is, so the lady tells him,  
beyond the range of serious argument.

Thou hast nor ear, nor soul, to apprehend  
The sublime notion and high mystery  
That must be uttered to unfold the sage  
And serious doctrine of Virginity;  
And thou art worthy that thou shouldst not know  
More happiness than this thy present lot.

So truly and earnestly does she speak, that  
even the tempter recognises the power of her  
words.

She fables not. I feel that I do fear  
Her words set off by some superior power.

Thus, strong in her simple and virtuous inno-  
cence, she keeps her soul free, though her body  
is the prisoner of enchantments. And virtue has  
her strength in heaven. The attendant spirit  
brings the lady aid, and by the intervention of  
Sabrina the spell is broken and the captive set free  
to move. The moral of the masque is declared to

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+ be the victory of virtue. The three actors, the lady and her two brothers, are presented as those who have been tried and have conquered.

Heaven hath timely tried their youth,  
Their faith, their patience, and their truth,  
And sent them here through hard assays  
With a crown of deathless praise,  
To triumph in victorious dance  
O'er sensual folly and intemperance.

The epilogue spoken by the guardian spirit proclaims the principle that true virtue will never be left strengthless and unaided against the power and stratagems of reckless vice. Heaven claims virtue as her own offspring, and the Lord of heaven is mindful of His own. Those who would pursue the highest ideal, the true angel of life, must first be enamoured of true goodness.

Mortals, cries the guardian spirit, the good angel,

Mortals, that would follow me,  
Love Virtue ; she alone is free.  
\* She can teach ye how to climb  
Higher than the sphery chime ;  
Or, if Virtue feeble were,  
Heaven itself would stoop to her.

## CHAPTER VIII

### “THE ANCIENT MARINER”

FEW men have more profoundly influenced the thoughts of Englishmen than the poet Coleridge. It is curious to notice the acknowledgments of his influence made by men of very different minds and dispositions. The late Principal Shairp gathered together some of these acknowledgments in his admirable “Essay on Coleridge.” He tells us how men so diverse as Wordsworth, Dr. Arnold, Newman, Julius Hare, F. D. Maurice, and Mill spoke with warm admiration of the stimulating influence of Coleridge’s teaching or personality. It is a strange group of divergently illustrious men; the poet whose philosophy was Nature, and the philosopher who worshipped at the shrine of cold utilitarianism; the devout liberal who recognised no authority as having a right to blind man in his search for truth; the subtle doubter who welcomed

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authority in the hope of losing the burdensome responsibility of further search for truth; the enthusiastic believers in that living God whose spirit was at hand to guide the single-hearted into the way of truth—these are the characters which unite in acknowledging the intellectual invigoration which they derived from Coleridge. To Wordsworth he was “the only wonderful man I ever met”; to Arnold the greatest intellect England had produced within his memory; to Newman he was the witness of the desire for deeper and higher things that had come as a hunger upon English intellectual life; to Julius Hare he was “the great religious philosopher to whom the mind of our generation in England owes more than to any other man”; to Maurice he was the teacher who awoke his constant reverence; to Mill he was the man who had done so much to shape the opinions of the younger generation.

Coleridge was always a philosopher; he possessed in a remarkable degree the inquisitive mind which would fain explore metaphysical mysteries and the towering imagination which could marshal his thoughts and illumine them with the light which never was, on sea or land. “Have you ever heard Coleridge preach?” some

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one asked. “I never heard him do anything else,” was the reply. It expresses exactly the quality of Coleridge’s mind. His ideas were always being formed by philosophical reflection, but when formed they belonged not to his brain alone, but to his soul. It was a joy, perhaps a necessity, to him to give them utterance; his vivid and ready imagination could make them luminous as he spoke. He was the preacher, enforcing his beliefs with intense earnestness and seeking to make them clear by wealth of illustration and lofty flights of fancy.

There is one feature about Coleridge’s religious thought which must be remembered if we are to understand him. He believed in the self-evidencing power of truth. Let us consider what this means. Coleridge was born in 1772; he entered Cambridge in 1791, and he left it without a degree in 1794. Paley’s work on “The Evidences of Christianity” was published in 1794. Paley’s work was the culmination of a series of works all of them animated by the same spirit and conviction. For a hundred years the latent or expressed thought of the Christian apologists had been that Christianity could be demonstrated to be reasonable, *i.e.*, that when brought to the tribunal of dry reason it could

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make good its claims to the homage of man's intelligence. The Christian advocate of the times said in effect to the sceptic, "You do not believe in Christianity, then I shall prove to you its truth; and I challenge you as an honest jurymen to give me the verdict of *proved*." It is not for us to find fault with men who breathed the atmosphere and spoke the language of their own times and generation, but it is evident to us that in this method of demonstration there was one thing which was forgotten, and that was religion. The acquiescence of the intellect in a clear and cogent argument would not make a man religious. By the very side of the men, like Warburton and Sherlock and Watson, who were seeking in one way or another to prove Christianity, there were men of less cultivation and less intellectual acuteness, who were not trying by argument to demonstrate the truth of Christianity, but who were demonstrating in practical fashion the power of Christianity to reform men's lives. While the apologists were arguing, Wesley and Whitefield, Cecil and Simeon were drawing men out of darkness into light and from the power of Satan unto God.

When Coleridge went to Cambridge Simeon had been eight or nine years at work there. It

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does not appear that Coleridge came in any way under Simeon's influence, and it is more likely than not that the particular mode of presenting Christianity which Simeon loved would have been distasteful to Coleridge, who was philosophical where Simeon was exegetical. Moreover, at the time, Coleridge's mind was under the influence of Unitarian thought, and he was supporting a Fellow of Jesus College, Friend by name, who was driven from the University because of his religious views. But if Coleridge was unlikely at that time to be attracted or influenced by the great Evangelical leader, he was not attracted by the intellectual school of rationalists who dealt with religion as though it consisted of a series of propositions like those of Euclid, all of which could be ended with a satisfactory *Q.E.D.* He certainly came to sympathise far more with those who had faith in Christianity as a power which could find response to its appeal in the very soul of man. We have proof of this in Coleridge's own indignant expostulation, “Evidences of Christianity! I am weary of the word. Make a man feel the want of it, rouse him, if you can, to the self-knowledge of the need of it, and you may safely trust it to its own evidence, remembering always



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the express declaration of Christ Himself, 'No man cometh to me unless the Father leadeth him.'" This language is certainly more in harmony with the teaching of Cecil and Simeon than that of Paley and Bishop Watson. This, of course, is the language of Coleridge's maturer thought. It does not belong to the period of his residence at Cambridge; but with a mind such as he possessed, the germs of the maturer conditions were at work long before the earlier forms of belief were cast aside. I am inclined to believe that the anchorage of his belief was made earlier than he himself was aware of. We must not always assume that a vessel has changed its moorings because it swings to fresh positions with the changing tide. But whether Coleridge reached fixed principles of belief before he himself realised them or not, it is interesting to take up the poem which I will venture to call Coleridge's great religious poem, "The Ancient Mariner," and notice how far it gives expression to principles which found more philosophical utterance in his later life. "The Ancient Mariner" was written in 1797; Coleridge's visit to Germany was paid in 1798; in 1799 he was back in England, and was busy in translating Schiller's play of "Wallenstein."

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The period of German influence had begun, but before he left England the shackles of his materialistic views had begun to fall from him; he had drunk from the clear springs of mystic teaching, and the writings of the mystics he tells us, “acted in no slight degree to prevent my mind from being imprisoned within the outline of any dogmatic system. They helped to keep alive the heart within the head; gave me an indistinct yet stirring and working presentiment that all the products of the mere reflective faculty partook of death. . . . If they were a moving cloud of smoke to me by day, yet were they a pillar of fire throughout the night during my wanderings through the wilderness of doubt, and enabled me to skirt, without crossing, the sandy deserts of unbelief.” This is a remarkable passage, and goes to show two things: first, that during the transition period of his life, the mystics, Tauler, William Law, and others, exercised a powerful influence upon Coleridge’s thought; and second, that he never wholly lost himself in what he terms “the sandy deserts of unbelief.” The promised land was before his thought even while he was in the wilderness, and the mystic teachers provided him with the Shekinah light. It would thus

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appear that while he was living close to the Quantock Hills, "amid the woods, smooth downs and valleys with small brooks running down them through green meadows to the sea," Coleridge's mind was opening to fresher and brighter conceptions; he saw the sparkle of those streamlets which, wherever they take their rise, are sure to make their way towards the great ocean of that love which embraces man on every side. There thus appears to be some ground for thinking, that at the time "The Ancient Mariner" was written the germs at any rate of a deeper realisation of the significance of life, responsibility and divine guidance were at work in the poet's mind.

Carrying these thoughts with us, let us turn to "The Ancient Mariner." I have called it a great religious poem. It is not, of course, formally religious; it is but the weird record of the supposed adventure of an old sailor; it was based on a dream which Coleridge had heard from a friend. An incident in the poem, which we must allow to be an important one from an ethical point of view, was suggested by Wordsworth; this is the shooting of the albatross, to which Coleridge gave such deep significance. But if in outward form the poem cannot be called

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religious, in its spirit it is steeped in religious thought and conviction. Into it has passed, perhaps unconsciously to the poet himself, the profoundest human experiences which are indicative of the energy of the religious consciousness.

First the Ancient Mariner is presented to us as a kind of prophet. He has a message which he must deliver; he goes seeking for the man to whom the message must be given; when he sees he knows him; and when he sees him he must speak. The prophet may be a bore, breaking at inconvenient moments upon the planned pleasures of life, but if he is a bore, he is a fascinating bore. The victim of the prophet seeks to get away.

By thy long grey beard and glittering eye,  
Now wherefore stoppest me ?

The Bridegroom's doors are opened wide,  
And I am next of kin ;  
The guests are met, the feast is set ;  
May'st hear the merry din.

But vainly does the listener seek to escape. The old sailor holds him with his eye. The victim loses his impatience as the spell begins to work upon him.

The Wedding-guest stood still  
And listens like a three years child ;  
The Mariner hath his will.

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The Ancient Mariner exerts this fascination, because it is laid upon him to tell his story. We have read of the prophet's burden. The message pressed like lead upon the prophet's soul, he must tell it; like the Apostle, he felt that a woe was upon him if he failed to speak; the word of God was like fire, which struggled to break forth in speech and would take no denial. It is when men are thus full-charged in their souls with a message that they exert a fascination over others. When a truth possesses a man's soul, he has it in him to take possession of the souls of other men. This is the position of the Ancient Mariner.

And what is the story which he has to tell? It is his own story. This again is the fascination of it. It is not a second-hand tale; it is not an elaborately imagined story; it is a simple record of what befell him. Whatever of truth there may be in it has been translated into the terms of experience. It is not, if we may use the expression, theological; it is personal. It may not be the less theological for all that; it may even be more so; but it is not presented from the intellectual standpoint. We recall Coleridge's words about the evidences of religion: "Make a man feel the want of it (religion); rouse him to the self-knowledge of the need of it." It is only

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powerful over other men when it is personal. The Evangelist who can say, “That which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and our hands have handled,” is greater than the philosopher who can say “Lo, I have now clearly proved this.” To know God is a deeper thing than merely to have demonstrated His existence.

But can we say as much as this for the Ancient Mariner? Is the message which he gives a message of his own personal knowledge of God? Surely it is. The bitter, strange and unworldly experience which he has undergone has led him to the realisation of God. Now with opened eye and kindling faith he feels how living is the presence of God. The simple things which were once accepted as a dull, necessary, but profitless routine now come to have a sacred significance and a sure spiritual helpfulness; they minister a joy which far exceeds all earthly joy.

O sweeter than the marriage-feast,  
'Tis sweeter far to me,  
To walk together to the kirk  
With a goodly company!—  
To walk together to the kirk,  
And all together pray,  
While each to his great Father bends,  
Old men, and babes, and loving friends,  
And youths and maidens gay!

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This is the language of one who has discovered the sacredness and therefore the gladness of things once neglected and despised. He has found out how much of heaven lies unnoticed and unused around the lives of men.

What has produced this change? Of men to whom this power of vision is given, we are inclined, realising that the guiding hand of a Higher Power must have been at work in their lives, to ask, "What did He to thee? How were thine eyes opened?" The Ancient Mariner's story gives the reply. He has chronicled his experience; he sums it all up in one pregnant sentence in the closing stanzas. What it amounts to is this: he has been in hell and therefore he can appreciate heaven.

O Wedding-guest! this soul hath been  
Alone on a wide wide sea;  
So lonely 'twas, that God himself  
Scarce seemèd there to be.

He has been on the margin of that region where God is not; he has been to the borderland of hell. To the untroubled and undisciplined soul, which is following its own caprice and living in a reckless pleasure-seeking fashion, heaven would be the spot where the restraints of righteousness do not make themselves felt and

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where the remembrance of God brings no mis-giving. Such say to the Father of all—“Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways.” To such the torment of life seems that they cannot escape God—“If I climb up into heaven Thou art there: if I go down into hell Thou art there also; if I take the wings of the morning and abide in the uttermost part of the sea, even there shall Thy hand find me, and Thy right hand shall lead. If I say peradventure the darkness shall cover me then shall my night be turned into day.” For the soul that is seeking uninterrupted self-indulgence, that longs to bury itself in the night where its deeds may be unmarked, there is nothing more horrible than the tormenting, pursuing light of God’s inevitable presence. But there comes a moment when men must realise that far more awful than the persistent noon-day of God’s presence is the bleak solitude of the place where He is not. When they draw near to the verge of that place which is hell, where no divine presence sheds its light, where the sweet pasture of life is dried up for the lack of His dew, and the varied colours of life sink into incoherence for lack of His light, then they begin to realise how awful it is to be



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without Him, and how truly He is the source of all our being, the fountain-head of all our seeing, the hypothesis which underlies all our certitude of existence, the fragrance, the balm, the wind, the ocean, the sunlight, the atmosphere of our life. To drift away to the extreme limit of existence, to feel ourselves slipping out of all that makes life tolerable, sure, warm and pulsating with living energy, to find the chill of a lifeless and loveless realm round about us, the wide and weary reaches of a windless and unpeopled ocean stretching in hateful wastes in every direction, is just to have a glimpse of that nether world, the motionless icy hell, where God is not. The glimpse into this region has been the experience of the Ancient Mariner. He has been where no living creature was with him: the dead were round about him; the dead and motionless sea seemed to rot around him; it brought forth the things of death.

Day after day, day after day,  
We stuck, nor breath nor motion  
As idle as a painted ship  
Upon a painted ocean.

Water, water, everywhere,  
And all the boards did shrink;  
Water, water, everywhere,  
Nor any drop to drink.

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The very deep did rot ; O Christ !  
That ever this should be !  
Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs  
Upon the slimy sea.

And across the sea no true help came. The hoped-for sail only proved a ship of death, a skeleton ship, which carries those who stake the issues of life on chance. With the passing of hope, life passes from the comrades of the Ancient Mariner, and as his fellow-sailors pass away, they seem to curse him who has brought them to these straits.

One after one, by the horned moon,  
(Listen, O ! stranger to me !)  
Each turned his face with a ghastly pang  
And cursed me with his e'e.

Four times fifty living men,  
With never a sigh or groan,  
With heavy thump, a lifeless lump,  
They dropped down one by one.

So the ship remains upon the lifeless sea with its cargo of dead men The Ancient Mariner tastes the horrors of a loneliness from which movement, life and the kindly smiles of men have passed away.

Alone, alone, all, all alone,  
Alone on the wide, wide sea !  
And Christ would not take pity on  
My soul in agony.

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And lonely as he was, environed by horrors,  
and envisaged by the stony eyes of his dead  
comrades, he found himself robbed of the power  
of realising the pity or the presence of God.

I looked upon the rotting sea,  
And drew my eyes away ;  
I looked upon the ghastly deck,  
And there the dead men lay.

I looked to heaven, and tried to pray ;  
But or ever a prayer had gusht,  
A wicked whisper came, and made  
My heart as dry as dust.

Here we touch upon the cause of all the  
sorrow. The life which has been wrapped up  
in self, and reckless of responsibility, has gar-  
nered up for itself its own torment. Evil and  
selfish deeds make deep impressions upon our  
nature, and when we would escape them they  
entangle us. Memories of ill, hideous thoughts  
of wrong which we would fain banish, intrude  
themselves upon the moments which we desire  
to consecrate. This is the last horror, when  
finding ourselves alone we find also that our sins  
separate us from God, and so we discover the  
loneliness of that place where God scarce seems  
to be. This is the last stage of loneliness ; under  
its discipline he passes out of his egotism and  
he finds a joy in the life of creatures other than

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himself. Under the moonbeams the water-snakes play, and their grace of movement and beauty of hue are to him a revelation of the gladness of other lives, and there is awakened within him a sympathy with other existences. He passes out of self into sympathy. The sense of a harmony of soul with things about him steals over him. This is the silver thread of his deliverance; he was able to pray, and the albatross, the symbol of his reckless and selfish wrong-doing, falls from his neck; the burden of his sin passes away; he enters into accord with the divine order of things; the sense of estrangement having passed away, he can enter into a rest to which he has long been a stranger. He falls asleep. With sleep comes the benediction of heaven. The heaven gives its refreshing rain. The winds of God propel the ship. The dead men rise up animated by heavenly power. All is given back again in dreamlike but heavenly guise. Angel-helpers are with him till once more familiar scenes are reached.

Oh! dream of joy! Is this indeed  
The light-house top I see?  
Is this the hill? Is this the kirk?  
Is this mine own countree?

But before he touches the dear familiar con-

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lines of his own home-land, he must pass through one stirring experience—all the remnants of the past must sink away. The old order must change entirely. The sound of coming change is heard.

Under the water it rumbled on,  
Still louder and more dread ;  
It reached the ship ; it split the bay ;  
The ship went down like lead.

The past has gone. Only the burning memory of it remains, and like a burden it sometimes presses so sorely upon him that he needs must tell his message. For the rest a peace and a joy in all created things are his. Everything is God's, and the mark of the divine love abides upon all: the Ancient Mariner is filled with a deep surpassing love towards all that God has made and loves.

Farewell, farewell ! but this I tell  
To thee, thou Wedding-guest :  
He prayeth well who loveth well  
Both man and bird and beast.  
He prayeth best who loveth best  
All things both great and small ;  
For the dear God who loveth us,  
He made and loveth all.

This is none other than that realisation of God as love which means a new creation of the whole

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man and a redemption of the whole life into usefulness and tenderness; and this change has been wrought not by argument but by experience. The discipline of experience has awakened man to the consciousness of his deep spiritual need, and at the same time to the capacity of realising that close at hand to every man are the love and the presence of God which alone can satisfy the soul.

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## CHAPTER IX

### TENNYSON

TENNYSON'S childhood coincided with the closing years of the reign of George III. He was between five and six when the battle of Waterloo was fought; he was in his eleventh year when George III. died and "the first gentleman in Europe" ascended the throne. The political atmosphere was disturbed; the claims for Roman Catholic Emancipation were put forward loudly and even threateningly; the clamour for Reform was high: the powers of the new epoch were at work. In the religious world the Evangelical movement had somewhat spent its force: Simeon was still a power in Cambridge; but the minds of men were being drawn towards great public questions, and the power of the future was passing into other hands. The spirit of historical investigation was stirring; and the story of the past was to be rewritten with

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greater exactness and truer conception of historical perspective. Tennyson was early subject to deep religious impressions. The sternness of his father's rule and the sensitive quality of his imagination combined to make him yearn for escape from a life which at times seemed to be unendurable. Among the graves at Somersby he would fling himself, wishing in childish fashion to reach the quiet of the tomb. But he had the strong vein of solid good sense which is characteristic of the greatest poets. His fits of depression were only occasional; and when we get a glimpse of the religious impressions as they formed themselves in his young mind, we find a sedateness of thought which restrained the passionateness of youthful impulses. The prayer which he composed, and which we are told still remains written in his boyish hand, possesses an almost laboured dignity, as though the instinct of composition, as well as a natural reverence, compelled him to curb all unseemly outburst of personal emotion. It is a prayer to the Lord God Almighty, who is high above all height. It asks Him to condescend to behold the work of His "hands kneeling before Him." He is the God of heaven and earth, the creator of "the immeasurable sea." It



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appeals for pity to Him who did "leave the right hand of the Father to endure the agonies of the crown of thorns."

Two somewhat opposite influences of religious thought met in Tennyson's home. One of his aunts was a rigid Calvinist, who once said to him, "Alfred, Alfred, when I look at you I think of the words of Holy Scripture, 'Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire.'" In his father's teaching there was heard a larger and more merciful message. He preached a gospel more akin to the spirit of Christ than some of his contemporaries. "The benevolent genius of Christianity affords the strongest presumption of its verity." The Almighty, so infinitely benevolent, can only wish to ensure the happiness of His creatures. A religion which did not display a benevolent tendency could not be from God. "What is revealed to us by Christianity but the Redemption of the whole human race by the merits of a crucified Saviour, and the glorious assurance of a future state of existence?" It was from a home where such cross currents met that Tennyson went to Cambridge, and other and stronger influences touched his life. He met the men who had learned how to regard the past with more

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careful and more dispassionate eyes : the men whose hearts were aglow with sympathy for their fellow men, now for the Spanish patriots fighting against tyranny and the Inquisition, now for the working classes asking for the means of a more tolerable existence, now for the victims of slavery. He gave his support to the Anti-slavery Convention. But his sound judgment never deserted him, even when great evils and distresses called loudly for sympathy. He disliked the violence of hysterical and thoughtless enthusiasts. He repudiates the egotism of the revolutionary in lines written about this time, though not published till they appeared in his "Memoir" :

I, loving Freedom for herself,  
And much of that which is her form,  
Wed to no faction in the State,  
A voice before the storm,  
I mourn in spirit when I think  
The year, that comes, may come with shame,  
Lured by the cuckoo-voice that loves  
To babble its own name.

*Memoir*, vol. i. p. 41.

These lines, which reveal a mind which can maintain its stability even when moved by enthusiasm, express the native scorn for the hasty, selfish, and unreflecting people whom he denounced much later.

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Men loud against all forms of power,  
Unfurnished brows, tempestuous tongues,  
Expecting all things in an hour,  
Brass mouths and iron lungs.

The mind which can preserve a level temper, even when stirred by sympathy with noble aspirations, is one of healthiness and strength. Such a one will not be betrayed into morbid views of life, nor yet into cynical denunciations of it. On the contrary, he will recognise the joyousness which mingles with life's shadows like sunshine on a cloudy day: he will be glad that he is alive. To this emotion Tennyson gave utterance:

I thank thee, God, that Thou hast made me live ;  
I seek not for the sorrow and the strife ;  
One only joy I know, the joy of life.

*Memoir*, vol. i. p. 59.

It would prove too long a task to search out from Tennyson's writings an exhaustive account of his view of life; but we may fairly ask whether, with the developing of experience and after deeper draughts from the cup of life, he retained the same high and courageous gladness. We are always interested to hear a man's verdict about life. We, who live in what is called a self-conscious age, when men have

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gravely discussed the question, Is life worth living? may perhaps feel a curiosity to know what a great contemporary has to say on the subject.

Tennyson, we may say at the outset, did not yield to the fascinating and fashionable temptation of bewailing self and abusing existence. He realised, no doubt, as all must, the vivid darkness of life's shadows. He saw that the dark contended with the light, and so strongly did he realise this that he did not wonder that a belief in twin powers of good and evil should have sprung up among men. Evil seemed at times so strong, nature so cruel, that it was hard to believe that God, the Supreme Power, was love, or love creation's final law; for nature in its fierce unrest and wanton sacrifice of life seemed to contradict the faith of the man who believed in such a superintending love :

Nature red in tooth and claw  
With ravine, shriek'd against his creed.

One book which put the case of the remorselessness of nature with great force and eloquence of expression, Mr. Winwood Reade's "Martyrdom of Man," attracted Tennyson's attention. It is a powerful indictment of nature

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based upon an entirely unethical conception of the universe, a rhapsody rather than an argument, full of strong and striking statements, and containing many wild and many stirring passages. But it leaves out of account man's witness concerning himself: the deep and ineradicable convictions of man as a spiritual being are not regarded. Man is viewed as a being filled with the power of a life which gives him the capacity of joy enough in existence to discover his own misery and the hideousness of the universe: for one brief moment he realises his rich but baffled powers of gladness, then the light of life is withdrawn and man sinks down into nothingness. "Life is bottled sunshine, and death the silent-footed butler who withdraws the cork." But Tennyson could not look upon life in so one-sided a fashion. The answer of man himself must be heard; the witness of the soul's experience must be allowed. If there was no presiding love, whence could man gain the idea of it? The God whom Nature half-concealed might be found more fully disclosed elsewhere.

I found Him not in world or sun,  
Or eagle's wing or insect's eye;  
Nor thro' the questions men may try,  
The petty cobwebs we have spun:

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If e'er when faith had fall'n asleep,  
I heard a voice, "Believe no more,"  
And heard an ever breaking shore  
That tumbled in the Godless deep ;

A warmth within the breast would melt  
The freezing reason's colder part,  
And like a man in wrath the heart  
Stood up and answered, "I have felt."

No, like a child in doubt and fear :  
But that blind clamour made me wise ;  
Then was I as a child that cries,  
But, crying, knows his father near :

And what I am beheld again  
What is, and no man understands ;  
And out of darkness came the hands  
That reach thro' nature, moulding men.

"In Memoriam," cxxiv.

At another time Tennyson calls upon man to choose between faith in the dark and faith in the light. There are shadows, but there is light. Is light the transient or is dark? Are we to judge of the world as a place whereon hope has embroidered illusory patterns of light on a wide-reaching background of dark? Or shall we deem the dark things to be passing shadows on an eternal brightness? Tennyson's answer is on the side of hope. We cannot prove, we cannot disprove, but we may choose; and it is Wisdom's choice to cling to her faith in the final victory of good.

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For nothing worthy proving can be proven,  
Nor yet disproven : wherefore thou be wise,  
Cleave ever to the sunnier side of doubt,  
And cling to Faith beyond the forms of Faith !  
She reels not in the storm of warring words,  
She brightens at the clash of " Yes " and " No,"  
She sees the Best that glimmers thro' the Worst ;  
She feels the sun is hid but for a night ;  
She spies the summer thro' the winter bud,  
She tastes the fruit before the blossom falls,  
She hears the lark within the songless egg,  
She finds the fountain where they wailed " Mirage ! "

"The Ancient Sage," pp. 57, 8.

It will be seen that this faith in the supremacy of light and love draws much of its strength from the inner affirmations of the soul. Tennyson, in fact, has faith in man. It has often been said that our conceptions of God are coloured by our conceptions of man, and *vice versá*. The hue of the sea depends upon the colour of the sky, and the clouds of earth dim the brightness of the sky. Where we find robust views of life and Man's duty, we find high confidence in the ultimate victory of good ; and where men have faith in the God of righteousness, we find them to be men who are braced up by high resolution and courage in duty. We find these correlative convictions in Tennyson. He would have men cleave to the sunny side in their thoughts of life : he has also confidence in Man's power to

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conquer difficulties. He would not have their activity or their courage paralysed by the shadowy influences of fortune or of fate.

Fate has been too often a terror-awaking figure to man. The mysterious wheel revolves and men rise and fall with it. Efforts are of little good: wailing and protestations are but empty and unavailing cries. Stern, inexorable, the wheel of life revolves, and the sight of Fortune's bewildering revolutions awakens strange longings in the hearts of men. The usual verdict passed upon fickle Fortune is that expressed by Alfieri, who fixes his thought upon the emptiness of fortune and the vanity of human hope.

Volubil ruota, infaticabilmente  
Rapida, ferve : edora innalza, or preme  
Le umane cose ; onde timore e speme  
Combatton sempre entro all' umana mente.  
Alfieri.—“ La Fortuna.”

The fickle wheel unweary rolling glows,  
Now lifting man, now crushing him with woes,  
While hope and fear alternate raise their crest,  
And fight for lordship in the human breast.

Fortune, who presides over the revolving wheel, receives various and contradictory names—



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Chi Dea, chi Donna e chi un Demon la credeo  
Solo il saggio un Fantasma in lei ravvisa :  
E chi la segue, assai men ch' essa vede.

*Ibid.*

Some deem her Goddess and some hail her Dame,  
While others cry that Demon is her name :  
The wise account her but a dream, a show.  
Far less she is, who follows her will know.

Tennyson writes in a manlier tone. Instead of dwelling long upon fortune, and allowing fierce hopes or unworthy fears to carry us away, he bids us recall our manhood, grasp duty and face circumstances. So he makes Enid sing—

Turn, Fortune, turn thy wheel and lower the proud ;  
Turn thy wild wheel, thro' sunshine, storm, and cloud ;  
Thy wheel and thee we neither love nor hate.

Smile and we smile, the lords of many lands ;  
Frown and we smile, the lords of our own hands ;  
For man is man and master of his fate.

“ The Marriage of Geraint.”

True lordship over life depends on a man's self. Geraint who hears the song wins in the fight, for he is a well-trained and self-disciplined knight. Later, he was tempted to allow his powers to rust, and he lived

Forgetful of his promise to the King,  
Forgetful of the falcon and the hunt,  
Forgetful of the tilt and tournament,

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Forgetful of his glory and his name,  
Forgetful of his princedom and its cares.

*Ibid.*

He seemed to fall below himself, and it was hateful to his loyal wife to hear men babbling that "his force was gone." According to the wise judgment of Tennyson, Man's power to overcome adverse circumstances and to achieve something worthy in life is conditioned by self-discipline, by an inward heed to the high voice of Duty, and the call of the true ideal manhood. Such a man is master of his fate. So he sang in 1863. Does he alter his note in later years? In "Locksley Hall Sixty Years After," he touches the oft-recurring problem of the conflict of the light and dark in human affairs, but still with confidence in the final victory of the good.

Truth, for Truth is Truth, he worshipt, being true as he was brave ;  
Good, for Good is Good, he followed, yet he looked beyond the  
grave,  
Wiser these than you, that crowning barren Death as lord of all,  
Deem this over-tragic drama's closing curtain is the pall !

Still he encourages the brave man to follow  
the highest.

Follow Light and do the Right—for man can half-control his  
doom—  
Till you find the deathless Angel seated in the vacant tomb.

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Tennyson has been called by some half a Pagan. Naturally those who look into his poems in search of clear and sharply-defined utterances of dogmatic belief will come away disappointed. The poet is seldom a dogmatist. He believes in atmosphere, and he draws his pictures as an artist, not as an analytical chemist. Tennyson moreover saw that forms of faith partook of the frailty and limitations of the human minds who gave them form : he believed that that which truly nourished men's souls was the truth which men tried to express in form, but which was more eternal than any transient vehicle of expression ; therefore, in persuading men to the pathway of faith, he commended not the form, but the faith beyond the forms of faith. This counsel cannot be acceptable to those who claim that their own form of faith embraces or gives complete and infallible expression to the eternal truth ; but it will not cause pain or dismay to those who realise that, while the human mind must always attempt to clothe its ideas of truth in human language, human language is but a limited vehicle of thought. If our creeds teach us that God is incomprehensible, must we not allow that eternal truth must always surpass all our efforts to express it adequately ? The form

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may be true as far as it goes; it may even be, for the time, the best possible mode of declaring the truth; but in the day when we shall know even as we are known, we shall realise that no human eloquence or exactitude of expression could completely set forth the varied wonderfulness or the manifold comprehensiveness of any one divine truth. Remembering this, however much we may value for their purpose and use the venerable forms of Christian dogma, we should be grateful to those poets who lift our thoughts into regions in which truth is seen, not in its scientific, but in its vital and comprehensive aspect.

Tennyson's desire to lift truth above definition carried with it neither the approval nor the denial of some of the accepted forms of truth; while his emphatic declarations of certain great principles are sufficient to set him above the charge of semi-paganism. He is, as we have seen, serious and earnest in his assertion of the divine love which guides and directs all: he is strong in his grasp over the idea of a life to come. This life would be but a hollow mockery, a meaningless show, if we were to regard it as final; on the contrary the perception of the everlasting significance of things has been

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## The Religious Spirit in the Poets

the constant guiding light of mankind. "Gone for ever?" he asks of the sacrifice of human lives.

Gone for ever! Ever? No—for since our dying race began,  
Ever, ever, and for ever was the leading light of man.

Those that in barbarian burials killed the slave, and slew  
wife,  
Felt within themselves the sacred passion of the second life.

Truth for truth, and good for good! The Good, the True, the  
Pure, the Just;  
Take the charm "For ever" from them, and they crumble  
into dust.

"Locksley Hall Sixty Years After."

He is insistent on the truth that in the very depths of his being Man may find the witness of the divine. Completely to know self is to discover God; and in this discovery there is the attestation of the larger destiny which awaits Man.

Only That which made us, meant us to be mightier by and by,  
Set the sphere of all the boundless Heaven within the human  
eye,  
Sent the shadow of Himself, the boundless, thro' the human  
soul;  
Boundless inward, in the atom, boundless outward, in the Whole.  
*Ibid.*

When we realise the turmoil, conflict and sorrow of life, and then set side by side with

## Tennyson

these the measureless longings, unquenchable instincts, and self-revelations of the human soul, perceiving the marvellous and unvanquishable divine force which bursts out in Man's spiritual nature and history, we catch the glimpse of a struggle, not meaningless, nor doubtful, no wild and dateless controversy as between Ormuz and Ahriman, but of a conflict glorious in itself and predestined to yet more glorious end : the battle is education, as the very conditions of progress are conflict : the victory is the evolution of the spirit and character of Man, of Man emancipated from the mastery of passions which degrade him, and of those transitory conditions of this needful but brief existence.

A friend of the poet tells how once, when walking with him over the blossoming heath above Haslemere, they were speaking of the problems of life, and he ventured to say that he thought "education" was the key to much that was perplexing. Tennyson assented ; stood for a moment in thought, and then broke out into the lines, then unpublished :

God let the house of a beast to the soul of a man.

Said the man, " Am I your debtor ? "

No, said the Lord—make it clean if you can,

And then I'll give you a better.

The longing for the freedom of an existence

## The Religious Spirit in the Poets

purged and cleansed from the down-weighting influences and exigencies of the flesh was strong in him, and grew stronger, as life drew to its close. The spirit of Man was like a captive, narrowed and imprisoned; yet the very limitations of the prison-house served for discipline, education, growth. Early in life he had declared that the very pain which springs from aspirations often baffled was the evidence of Man's capacity for better things. Low animal contentment was not for beings in whom there lived a spark of what was divine.

I envy not the beast that takes  
His license in the field of time,  
Unfettered by the sense of crime,  
To whom a conscience never wakes.

“In Memoriam” xxviii.

The painful may be nobler than the painless; the unsatisfied battling towards the higher may foreshadow the highest of all. Later he taught that the end of the weary battle between flesh and spirit will reveal the significance of life's long and divine training. In the poem entitled “By an Evolutionist”—the opening lines of which have already been given—Tennyson pictures old age with its weight of years and infirmities, and he represents man as questioning what use these served.

## Tennyson

What hast thou done for me, grim Old Age, save breaking my  
bones on the rack ?  
Would I had past in the morning that looks so bright from  
afar !

### OLD AGE.

Done for thee ?—starved the wild beast that was linkt to thee  
eighty years back.  
Less weight now for the ladder-of-heaven that hangs on a star.

Man is intended to be master in the realm  
assigned to him. The true man in man must  
truly rule. The counsel to him is

Hold the sceptre, Human Soul, and rule thy Province of the  
brute.

The struggle grows less as age advances ; the  
calm of self-conquest comes.

I have climb'd to the snows of Age, and I gaze at a field in the  
past,  
Where I sank with the body at times in the sloughs of a low  
desire,  
But I hear no yelp of the beast, and the Man is quiet at last  
As he stands on the heights of his life with the glimpse of a  
height that is higher.

These quotations express the feelings of his  
age. We can feel in many a phrase that the  
weariness of the body pressed upon the poet.  
The physical frame became a burden too burden-  
some to endure. It was "the poor rib-grated  
dungeon of the holy human ghost": it was



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destined to "vanish and give place to the beauty that endures." But the constant spiritual object before Man was the victory over self; the choice between the higher yielding to the lower, and the nobler triumphing over the lower was before Man. The man of self-pleasing and the man of self-surrender are both to be seen in our survey of the world, and we can read whence the inspiration of the latter was derived.

He that has lived for the lust of the minute, and died in the  
doing it, flesh without mind ;  
He that has nail'd all flesh to the Cross, till Self died out in the  
love of his kind.

" Vastness."

Tennyson's ideal in this matter remained the same throughout life. These utterances of his closing years are little more than echoes of the thoughts experienced more sweetly and more tenderly in the days of his strength. The ideal of life is the same; the man is to surrender his will to the higher will and nobler wisdom. The inspiration of this spirit is the same. Love, as expressed in the highest divinely human love which the world has known, love is his inspiration, for love alone can effect this true self-surrender; love alone can efface all forms of egotism, and cause selfishness to pass away in the music

## Tennyson

of a devoted and self-sacrificing life. This he gives voice to early and late; and the late utterances of it, vigorous and earnest as they are, never surpassed those earlier expressions so familiar to us all :

Strong Son of God, immortal Love  
Whom we, that have not seen thy face,  
By faith, and faith alone, embrace,  
Believing where we cannot prove ;

Thou seemest human and divine,  
The highest, holiest manhood Thou ;  
Our wills are ours, we know not how ;  
Our wills are ours, to make them Thine.

“ In Memoriam,” Prologue.

## CHAPTER X

### TENNYSON—IN MEMORIAM

ONE day when walking with the author up and down the Ball Room (as it was called) at Farringford, Tennyson was led to speak about "In Memoriam," and the strange and misunderstanding criticism which had assailed it. He referred to the criticism in the *Record*, in which the Reviewer said that Mr. Tennyson had barely escaped Atheism, and had plunged into the abyss of Pantheism, and then went on to speak of the general drift of "In Memoriam." It is, he said, a kind of small "Divina Commedia" ending in a marriage.

The comparison thus given us by the poet himself may serve as a guide to us in reading the poem. It resembles the "Divine Comedy" in that it takes us into the darkest regions, carries us through realms and times of self-conquest, and out again into a place of joy and gladness. We hear the sad dirge of the region of deepest

## Tennyson—"In Memoriam"

sorrow : sorrow seems to petrify : the Old Yew becomes a symbol of a changelessness which knows no spring.

The seasons bring the flower again,  
And bring the firstling to the flock ;

O not for thee the glow, the bloom,  
Who changest not in any gale,  
Nor branding summer suns avail  
To touch thy thousand years of gloom.

(ii)

The sullen tree exerts a fascination ; the poet seems to pass into a lower and passionless life like that of the tree.

I seem to fail from out my blood  
And grow incorporate into thee.

(ii)

After the stony grief comes a calmer time. The effect of the quietude, or self-mastery of soul in grief, is indicated after a year is gone :

So many worlds, so much to do,  
So little done, such things to be,  
How know I what had need of thee,  
For thou wert strong as thou wert true ?

(lxxiii)

Death has quenched the light which might have made his friend famous, but he will not curse Nature, no, nor death ; law rules everywhere.

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We pass : the path that each man trod  
Is dim, or will be dim, with weeds ;  
What fame is left for human deeds  
In endless age ? It rests with God.

(lxxiii)

Finally the acquiescence in God-appointed law which is here expressed gives place to the influence of hope. The minor key is seldom struck, and notes of joy are heard at the close. He can think of the lost as occupying a larger and nobler place, and

Trust that those we call the dead  
Are breathers of an ampler day  
For ever nobler ends.

(cxviii)

Thus at the close a brightness which the tomb cannot quench shines over the poet's thoughts. He can share the joy of those who joy in the wedding gladness.

To-day the grave is bright for me,  
For them the light of life increased,  
Who stay to share the morning feast,  
Who rest to-night beside the sea.

Let all my genial spirits advance  
To meet and greet a whiter sun.

(Epilogue)

As Dante's pilgrimage showed us the pilgrim travelling through the dark realms and climbing upwards till his soul shared the radiant joy of

## Tennyson—"In Memoriam"

the highest kingdom, so Tennyson treads a like path of gloom which ends in joy. We must not be content, however, to trace a superficial resemblance between "In Memoriam" and the "Divine Comedy." Tennyson was not likely to throw out a comparison based on the mere transit from darkness through struggle to light. The experience in the mediæval poem is a real one. Dante's was no fancy pilgrimage; it was the record of personal and painful experience. Doubtless Dante universalised himself in giving us his great poem, but the cradle of his poem was in the bitter, deep, and real facts of his own life. He could not have written the poem because he could not have conceived it unless he had himself gone down into the uttermost parts of the earth and entered through the gateway of the Hell. The poem is a tale of spiritual experience—the record of a soul's agony; in its earliest stages we might call it tragedy; but the glory of the close transforms it into comedy. It is dramatic, if by that we understand the story of the discipline and development of a man's character. It is a spiritual drama, the triumphant close of which is the victory of the man who emerges from his lower bondage into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

## The Religious Spirit in the Poets

The stages of the drama are sufficiently clear. The time-marks in the poem indicate their character. The soul which has become entangled in sin must pass into its appropriate hell. It must see things as they are—evil as it is, sin in its veritable ugliness. For Dante there is no other way. Is there another way for any? Must we not all realise that sin is evil and that the self which leads to sin must be forsaken?

Therefore when Dante has traversed the dark regions of Hell, he has to change the whole attitude of his life. This he narrates. When the fitting place was reached, he tells us :

My leader there, with pain and struggling hard,  
Turned round his head where his feet stood before,  
And grappled at the fell as one who mounts ;  
That into hell methought we turned again.  
“ Expect that by such stairs as these,” thus spoke  
The teacher panting like a man forespent,  
“ We must depart from evil so extreme.”

“ Inferno,” xxxiv. 78-84.

A new direction must be given to his aims : a self-revolution must be accomplished. He must cleanse his face with heavenly dew and bind himself with the girdle of new resolves ; and, turning himself away from his former self, he

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must now climb upwards till he has won the habit of self-mastery.

But even then the old self is not wholly swept away. Only when a new and heaven-born passion, a love akin to God's love, takes possession of his soul, is he impelled, as by an inward and wholly natural impulse, Godward, and only when so impelled does he enter into regions of changeless joy. Thus self sees the hideousness of that self which is sin. Patient and prolonged efforts win habits of self-mastery; the half-heaven—the Paradise which is still an earthly Paradise—of self-control is reached; and then at length the fire-baptism of a God-sent love creates true heavenliness of spirit. The larger love takes the place of the lesser love, and all traces of egotism finally fall away from the soul.

The pilgrimage of Dante is universal. It has its counterpart in the personal experiences of many. In every crisis of life the essential features of such an experience may be repeated. Grief, the loss of a dear friend, calls forth not only profound sorrow, but often a sorrow more or less tinged with egotism. We are all aware of the strong sentimental element which mingles with our grief: but we are not perhaps all aware why this sentimental element, though it attracts



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us when the sorrow is our own, repels us when the sorrow is another's. The reason is that in the sentimental element lurks the egotism of grief: we perceive it as it mingles in the sorrow of others: we hardly notice it in our own.

If the value of every crisis of life is to help us to get rid of some residue of self, then our sorrow only becomes a clear, bright, elevating and refining sorrow, when it is free from the dregs of egotism. Let us keep this in mind, and we shall see how "In Memoriam" traces the progress of a sorrow in which the soul is lifted from a grief which has a good deal of self in it into a larger and purer atmosphere, where the sense of loss and the power of love remain, but are set free from the earthly sentimentalism which disfigured the first beginnings. There, as in the "Divine Comedy," the incoming of a larger love, or the lifting of love into a higher region, serves to banish every particle of egotism; for love alone frees self from self.

Before we illustrate these stages from the poem, it is well to recall that Tennyson, like Dante, immortalises a real experience. A personal sorrow lies at the root of the poem. Had Arthur Hallam not died, "In Memoriam" had not been written. We can trace the personal

## Tennyson—"In Memoriam"

reminiscences which arise to heighten sorrow : the visit to Cambridge, and the sight of the familiar door in the long unlovely street, awaken memories, and with them the wounds of sorrow bleed afresh ; but in the treatment of his subject, Tennyson goes beyond these individual recollections : he lets his imagination embrace universal life, and he incorporates into his verse experiences not necessarily his own. It is needful to give this caution, as curious critics have drawn false inferences from some lines, and read some fancied picture as though it delineated an actual occurrence of the poet's life. The practice of making deductions of this kind is not a just or fair one. Tennyson warmly repudiated such deductions.

"I do not always write in my own name," he said, speaking of one rather gross case of unwarrantable inference. We must beware, therefore, of leaping to conclusions or making convenient hypotheses to explain every fancy or concrete image we meet in the poem. The poet universalises himself as he writes, or perhaps we should say he draws the world with him into his experience. Nevertheless, strong personal sorrow is the occasion of the poem.

At first this grief is tinged with egotism. His

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sorrow is almost fierce: it sweeps away for a moment some of the happy truths which he once held to be sweet and wise: grief may bring gain, but if gain is to be, the sorrowing hand cannot reach forward to grasp the profit. Nay, he is not sure that it is not better to refuse such gain. Certainly he will hug his sorrow, as one who believes that it would be disloyalty to his friend to let it go.

Let Love clasp Grief lest both be drowned,  
Let darkness keep her raven gloss;  
Ah, sweeter to be drunk with loss,  
To dance with death, to beat the ground,  
Than that the victor Hours should scorn  
The long result of love, and boast,  
"Behold the man that loved and lost,  
But all he was is overworn!"

(i)

Sorrow whispers to him that the promises of Nature are all false: the best and sweetest of these are mere echoes of his own heart's wishes

And all the phantom, Nature, stands—  
With all the music in her tone,  
A hollow echo of my own—  
A hollow form with empty hands.

(iii)

His sorrow is so intense, words fail him. Let none measure his grief by his words. He uses words because they seem to soothe the stricken

## Tennyson—"In Memoriam"

heart. The music and measure of verse have power to ease the soul,

Like dull narcotics, numbing pain.

So he will use words—

In words, like weeds, I'll wrap me o'er,  
Like coarsest clothes against the cold ;  
But that large grief which these enfold  
Is given in outline and no more.

(v)

It is vain to tell him that loss is common to the race. The universality of sorrow does not make it less. In the early dawn he creeps to the door of the house where his friend once lived. He feels like a guilty thing as, in his loneliness, he draws near to the house—the hateful sounds of the busy and remorseless world break upon his ear, and in the damp grey morning he steals away.

He is not here ; but far away  
The noise of life begins again,  
And ghastly through the drizzling rain  
On the bald street breaks the blank day.

(vii)

Nature is calm with the calm of Autumn ; but in his heart if there is calm at all it is the calm of despair. The Autumn has passed, and the first Christmas since his friend's death draws near. The church bells from the four churches

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of the neighbouring hamlets break forth into Christmas peals. The sound of their voices rises and falls with the changes of the wind. He hears them as one who dreads to hear what only can bring agony with memory; he would almost rather have died than hear them again.

This year I slept and woke with pain,  
I almost wished no more to wake,  
And that my hold on life would break  
Before I heard those bells again.'  
(xxviii)

But Christmas Eve, while waking into painful life the memories of loss, exerts a soothing influence and brings a tenderer and therefore a more hopeful feeling. The Yuletide was as before marked by old pastimes; the gladness seemed an old pretence, for everyone felt as though a mute shadow sat near, watching all; but after a while a gentler feeling began to creep over the household circle. The dead are at rest. Following this gentler feeling, the old hope comes pleading for entrance into these saddened hearts.

Our voices took a higher range;  
Once more we sang: "They do not die  
Nor lose their mortal sympathy,  
Nor change to us, although they change."  
(xxx)

## Tennyson—"In Memoriam"

So with lighter heart the Christmas morning  
is welcomed.

Rise, happy morn, rise, holy morn,  
Draw forth the cheerful day from night :  
O Father, touch the east, and light  
The light that shone when Hope was born.

(xxx)

We thus reach one turning-point of the poem. The strong expressions of passionate and personal grief are now less frequent. We enter upon the second part of the poem. There is a step forward in the purgation of grief, when the mind, released from the first paroxysms of sorrow, is free to enter upon the many dark problems which surround the thought of death. This part is interesting or not according to the mood in which we approach it. It contains some of the best-known passages in the poem. In it we have the appeal to the larger mind, which believes that it has escaped the need of formulating its faith, to respect the more child-like faith that delights in form (xxxiii); the passage which proclaims that a religion which is to be world-wide must be something other than a philosophy: truth to be made current coin must be embodied in person, life and action, and not in mere dogma.

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And so the Word had breath, and wrought  
With human hands the creed of creeds  
In loveliness of perfect deeds,  
More strong than all poetic thought.

(xxxvi)

Here too we meet the passionate expression of faith that good and not evil must be the consummation of all, and

That nothing walks with aimless feet ;  
That not one life shall be destroyed  
Or cast as rubbish to the void,  
When God hath made the pile complete.

(liv)

Near to this follows the stanza which sets in contrast the heedlessness of nature and the higher hopes in man. The highest types of life are sacrificed ; Nature writes her stern verdict on mountain and rock, and

Cries, A thousand types are gone ;  
I care for nothing, all shall go.

(lvi)

These are some of the most familiar passages which occur in what we may term the more argumentative portion of the poem.

But now the second Christmas has come and gone. It has been haunted by no ghostly shadow ; only over its innocent joys there

brooding slept  
The quiet sense of something lost.

(lxxviii)

## Tennyson—"In Memoriam"

The deep affection is the same as ever, but regret can after long use look up with tearless eyes. So comes the change in which the quiet of a somewhat mastered passion prepares the way for better and enlarged love.

The poet realises that there may be a grief which is selfish in that it robs from us the opportunities and capacities for service.

My pulses therefore beat again  
For other friends that once I met ;  
Nor can it suit me to forget  
The mighty hopes that make us men.

(lxxxv)

It is in the light of the wide fields of use which love opens to men that he recognises that there is wrong in an excessive sorrow.

I count it crime  
To mourn for any over much.

(lxxxv)

This marks the landing-place whence he can mount to higher regions. In the thought of others he can, if not forget, yet lay aside his own grief. He can visit the old scenes which bring back the memory of youthful friendship ; he can read the old letters fragrant with an undying affection (xcv) ; he can climb the hill which overlooks a landscape, every feature of



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which breathes some gracious memory of his friend (c); but the egotism of his grief will master him no more: he is now free to look out upon the world with eyes of deeper and truer sympathy; it is certainly better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all; for love and sorrow conjoined can reveal much; and it is a high victory, nay, it is an entrance into a new life when love enables us to rise above self. So when another Christmas comes round,

No more shall wayward grief abuse  
The genial hour with mask and mime,  
(cv)

and the Christmas bells which break out upon the frosty air are now changed into a new song—the burden of which is the ushering in of a day bringing in better and nobler times. Let the new Christmas ring out the old and the evil, ring in the new and the good. Let wider human kindness spread through the world and make itself felt. Let it ring out the selfishness of grief: let it ring in a self-forgetting sympathy.

Ring out the grief that saps the mind,  
For those that here we see no more;  
Ring out the feud of rich and poor,  
Ring in redress to all mankind.

## Tennyson—"In Memoriam"

Ring out a slowly dying cause,  
And ancient forms of party strife ;  
Ring in the nobler modes of life,  
With sweeter manners, purer laws.

Ring out old shapes of foul disease :  
Ring out the narrowing lust of gold ;  
Ring out the thousand wars of old,  
Ring in the thousand years of peace.

Ring in the valiant man and free,  
The larger heart, the kindlier hand :  
Ring out the darkness of the land,  
Ring in the Christ that is to be.

(cvi)

Now the heart is beginning to learn the lesson of a higher and truer love. When the sad anniversaries recur, there will be no sad brooding, no shutting the door upon living friends, no self-chosen solitude.

We keep the day. With festal cheer,  
With books and music, surely we  
Will drink to him, whate'er he be,  
And sing the songs he loved to hear.

(cvii)

The poet will not shut him from his kind; he will not eat his heart alone (cviii). His longing is that the world shall grow better, growing, as his friend grew, not in power and knowledge only, but

In reverence and in charity.

(cxiv)

## The Religious Spirit in the Poets

He will teach the message which comes from the higher spirit which dwells and speaks in the heart of man. There he finds love and love's message to rebuke the utterances of the freezing reason (cxxiv), and love's message is heard like the sentinel cry of "All's well," heard in the darkness of the night. This love is the true master and guide of life.

Love is and was my King and Lord,  
And will be, tho' as yet I keep  
Within his court on earth, and sleep  
Encompassed by his faithful guard,

And hear at times a sentinel  
Who moves about from place to place,  
And whispers to the worlds of space,  
In the deep night, that all is well.

(cxxvi)

And all is well, tho' faith and form  
Be sundered in the night of fear ;  
Well roars the storm to those that hear  
A deeper voice across the storm.

(cxxvii)

The deeper voice proclaims the better day, the day of happy right for all men, when social truth and justice shall be accepted in the world. So the cry of faith rises at length above the conquered years "To one that with us works"—so comes the confidence that can trust,

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With faith that comes of self-control,  
The truths that never can be proved  
Until we close with all we loved,  
And all we flow from, soul in soul.

(cxxxii)

With these lines the poem proper ends, but the epilogue follows celebrating the wedding which might have evoked the most painful bitter memories, but which now calls forth a calm and tender sympathy. The poet is conscious that he has entered into a larger life, and that he is enriched with higher capacities of sympathy.

Regret is dead, but love is more  
Than in the summers that are flown,  
For I myself with these have grown  
To something greater than before.

Greater, too, are the hopes to which he can look forward. The vision of the peaceful soul is a fuller and wider vision. All the subtle threads of life are woven into one vast and wonderful and harmonious pattern; all the vicissitudes of human existence contribute to some great and noble end; the enlightened eyes of those who are near to God can read all Nature as a book, and all things are under the watchful care of God,

That God, which ever lives and loves,  
One God, one law, one element,  
And one far-off divine event  
To which the whole creation moves.

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The victory over sorrow is thus complete ; but rather, we should say, the victory over the egotism which mingled with grief in its earlier stages is complete. The victory, therefore, has been won in a conflict which is peculiarly treacherous ; it is a victory won over self when self has appeared in one of its subtlest and most specious forms, for it came as claiming the right to indulge itself under the plea of a faithful affection for a dead friend. No rebuke, no hard wisdom, no neatly-made maxims of good sense could subdue a refined and complicated egotism thus dexterously mixed up with natural and laudable affection. Only the advent of a higher and nobler love could do it. Evil must be overcome with good ; and this is especially true of the crafty and plausible selfishness which allies itself and strives to identify itself with honest, true, human love. But the higher love comes to him who makes love always his Lord and King. For such a one the earthly egotism is swept away as when a stream of fresh water cleanses the surface of a stagnant brook.

This small Divine Comedy thus ends, like its great predecessor, with the recognition of the love which is both beneath and above all things, and into whose purity humanity needs to be

## Tennyson—"In Memoriam"

drawn. Dante passes through pain, and in the end is cleansed and refined through love. Tennyson shows us the stages through which sorrow and love can lead the soul till it rises to the summit of a higher love. Love and sorrow are the angels of discipline. Sundered from one another they seem to fail. Sorrow without love is impotent to cleanse; love without sorrow misses the discipline. The Man of Sorrows was the Lord of Love: and the cross is love's supremest manifestation. To be crucified with Christ is the soul's richest experience, for it is to have the old self slain that the true self may appear. Then we can enter into the full meaning of the world in which we live: then we can understand that love which moves the sun and all the stars (Par. xxxiii. 145), and, resting in the God who ever lives and loves, look forward to that great divine event,

To which the whole creation moves.

## CHAPTER XI

### BROWNING

IT was once remarked that discussions on the poetry of Browning seemed inevitably to end in debate upon some religious question. This will not surprise any one who is a student of Browning's writings. His poems challenge religious discussion, and yet Browning is no religious poet in the sense in which Milton and Cowper are religious. He seldom treats of a distinctively religious subject; he certainly never approaches one from the conventional or so-called orthodox side; yet it would be difficult to find poetry in which the religious element is more strong. One writer has attempted to draw forth from Browning's writings a sort of confession of faith; and to show that his poetry yields specific evidence of his adhesion to the articles of the Christian Faith. Research of this kind is interesting, but it needs the greatest caution; it

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tends to reproduce or to accentuate that dogmatic temper which is so alien to the poetic temperament. The poet differs from the scientific theologian in this, that the latter loves sharp-drawn lines of distinction, while the former loves not definitions, because he feels how truth blends with truth and how much nature dislikes abrupt transitions and accomplishes her changes by insensible gradations. The scientific theologian separates elements that he may classify them; it is his part to label and arrange objects of interest in the museum of thought. The poet views elements in combination; he cares little for the dead matter, neatly arranged and carefully classified in the museum; he deals with life not with death. Death breaks up the living organism into its separate elements; death defines, but life defies definition, and its beauty is the greater the more triumphantly it can bewilder our attempted analysis. We may reduce the beauty lines of the Venus of Milo to mathematical proportion, but we do not increase thereby the charm of its loveliness. There is no doubt a just mathematical standard of beauty; numbers and proportion do lie somehow at the bottom of things; but these considerations bring about a sort of



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legalism in art; and law makes nothing perfect: the sense of harmony must not be that of a mathematical precision, it must be rather a music in the soul, an inspiration of joy; not a law, but a power, not the expression of a carnal commandment, but the effluence of an inward life. One therefore doubts the wisdom or the fitness of trying to reproduce doctrinal definitions from a poet's writings. Great teaching there undoubtedly is; living truths blaze like fire beneath the jewelled lines; but they are far more like the utterances of an evangelist than those of a theologian. The poet may be a philosopher, but it is certain that the philosopher will never be a poet. The poetic temperament dominates thought, uses thought as a craftsman uses his tools, and works out for us that which has vitality in it; gives us not a machine but a machine which moves; not a dead body, but a vision of delight; not something which instructs us, but something which inspires us.

Browning, perhaps more than other poets, demands that he shall be kept out of the hand of the theological anatomist; for Browning is the poet of life, of simple human life, of its anguish, its search, its doubt, its despair, its triumph. He does not find life through the-

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ology ; he finds theology, so far as he finds it at all, through life. He plunges into the midst of man's life—the life that he, and you and I, and all must live, the life that is so enchanting, so bewildering, so stimulating to effort, so provoking to ambition, so disappointing to desire, so heart-breaking, so hope-raising, so killing, so rejuvenating ; plunging into this perplexing, moving, mighty ocean of life, he asks what it means. Will the waves that are around lift us to the height of our desire or will they overwhelm us and beat out our lives ? Will the currents sweep us outward to death in mid-ocean ? Or is there some friendly tide which will gently but strongly bear us to some safe and happy shore ? Are our struggles in the great sea vain and void ? Are we the sport of forces mightier than ourselves ? Or do human efforts, strong, manly resolve, and high, trusting courage count for something in the interplay of enviroing powers ? He asks questions such as these, interrogating life with frank and open mind, and he shouts out to us across the storm the answers which he hears. He hears voices—and chiefly one voice over all. He hears voices—the voices of men who have lived on the surface or gone down into the depths of life ; but over all one

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voice which never ceases its speech, and which calls forth manhood, courage, faith, duty. He reaches God through life ; he has no cut and dry theory ; the truths he grasps are practical truths, truths to act by : he does not ask definition. We have to live, he seems to say, and the truths to live by are the truths we need. I do not want to theorise about what might have been, had things been other than they are. What is behind our life and what is beyond are outside our reach. Let us accept life and make the best of it ; and perhaps we shall by so doing see its meaning most clearly. It is idle to criticise what cannot be altered, and what perhaps we have not sufficient data to criticise at all. Let us be wise with that practical wisdom and with that reverence for life which is the beginning of wisdom. The rules of the game are fixed : let us not waste time in finding fault with the rules, but let us play the game according to the rules : perhaps we shall by doing so see some reason for the rules :

The common problem yours, mine, every one's,  
Is, not to fancy what were fair in life  
Provided it could be—but finding first  
What may be, then find out how to make it fair  
Up to our means.

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That is, accept the conditions, and try to make a good game of it.

Such is Browning's teaching. He has a vast fund of philosophy; we know as we read him that he understands the current speculative theories of his own and other ages, but his message is against speculating upon what might have been had other conditions prevailed, not to grumble at the facts, but to look at them, accept them, and see what can be made of them. Perhaps in obedience to the laws which govern us we may find a message from the voice which is above all law and all life.

Browning, as I have said, does hear that one surpassing voice, and whenever he hears it, he passes it on to us. Let us listen to the messages which the poet sends to us from time to time.

Chronology counts for something here. We shall enter best into the poet's teaching if we take his messages in the order in which he sent them. No doubt he would not wish to be held too literally to the phrases of his messages. He learned as he lived, and he would have called himself a learner to the last hour of his life. Not everything he wrote when young would be endorsed without qualification in his later years; but few things which he wrote in those tenta-

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tive years he would have wholly and entirely repudiated. His natural robustness of intellect saved him from the necessity of the confessions and retractations which keener and more impetuous minds have been compelled to make.

Browning in the days of his childhood attended a school kept by a good lady whose soul was filled with an old-fashioned piety. Every Saturday night, when her pupils' hair was specially attended to, she accompanied the washing, combing and oiling process with the recitation of Isaac Watts' version of Psalm xcii. The operation began with the first line: "Sweet is the work, my God and King." The combing out stage was reached when the dulness of the brutish man was described, and the tug of the comb through the obstinately entangled hair gave emphasis to the contempt of low-levelled natures.

Fools never raise their thoughts so high, [*tug*]  
Like brutes [*tug*] they live, like brutes [*tug*] they die.

The combing finished, the easier and more grateful operation of the oiling began, and the good lady's complacency grew as the tougher work of the combing and the sterner verses of the hymn were left behind.

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But I shall share a glorious part ;

*[Here the oil was being got ready.]*

When grace has well refined my heart,

And fresh supplies of joy are shed,

*[Here the unguinous hands began to work  
through the hair.]*

Like holy oil upon my head.

His father's house was the quiet suburban home of a man employed every day as a Bank clerk in London ; but it was a home in which cultivated tastes prevailed. His father had a small gift of versifying, and a certain fondness for quaint rhymes. He possessed a small number of old and rare books. The ancestors on the father's side were English ; through the mother there came a German and Scotch strain. Byron, Shelley, and Keats exercised a measure of influence on Browning's thoughts, as the poets of his early manhood ; but he had laid in a good foundation of the older poets of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. He had his period of mental unrest and revolt against existing order, like most other young men, but the period was comparatively short, his natural and practical robustness of character prevented his falling under the sway of any hysterical revolutionist. Strong religious conviction breathes in his earliest poems.

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“Pauline” is not one of his greatest works, but as the earliest it must interest us. It was esteemed by J. S. Mill, and by D. G. Rossetti. It appeared in 1833 when Browning was just of age. It was written when, as he himself tells us, “good draughtsmanship” and “right handling” were far beyond him; yet in the confession of Pauline’s lover we have “poetry always dramatic in principle,” and in the poem occur lines which Mrs. Sutherland Orr tells us may be taken as a mental portrait of the poet :

I am made up of an intenses life,  
Of a most clear idea of consciousness  
Of self.

“Pauline,” vol. i. p. 14.

This idea of consciousness is so clear that the speaker can separate it from the movement of all “affections, passions, feelings, power”: it is moreover linked in him to self-supremacy

Existing as a centre to all things ;

and “to a principle of restlessness”

Which would be all, have, see, know, taste, feel, all—  
This is myself.

Vol. i. p. 14.

“A mind like this must dissipate itself,” but there was one power which hindered the com-

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plete and fatal dissipation in the case of Pauline's lover.

But I have always had one lode-star; now,  
As I look back, I see that I have halted  
Or hastened as I looked towards that star—  
A need, a trust, a yearning after God.

Vol. i. p. 15.

Sometimes indeed he halted. He would look on life—"on real life." But he found it vanity. One by one his hopes vanished, his hopes of perfecting mankind, his faith in men, his faith in freedom's self, in virtue's self, his own motives, ends and aims, and "human love went last." Can he then be self-sufficing? He is conscious of his powers.

As some temple seemed  
My soul, where nought is changed and incense rolls  
Around the altar, only God is gone  
And some dark spirit sitteth in his seat.

Vol. i. p. 22.

Voices shouted to him. "Thyself, thou art our king;" but he realised that old age must come, and he would be left

A wreck linked to a soul  
Yet fluttering, or mind-broken and aware  
Of my decay.

Vol. i. p. 23

Later he learns the meaning of his "struggling aims." The soul, desiring to be first in all,



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sickens in its own victory. He reaches the conclusion that God is the thing the soul longs for.

The last point I can trace is—rest beneath  
Some better essence than itself, in weakness;  
This is “myself,” not what I think should be.

Vol. I. p. 37.

Thus early does Browning express his conviction that the way of true wisdom is to accept the facts of life as they are, to realise the true self, not to dream of being unreal gods in an unreal world, but true men in this world; and so perchance realise that the insatiable desire of the soul can find satisfaction only in God.

And what is that I hunger for but God?

My God, my God, let me for once look on Thee  
As though nought else existed, we alone!  
And as creation crumbles, my soul's spark  
Expands till I can say,—Even from myself  
I need Thee and I feel Thee and I love Thee.  
I do not plead my rapture in Thy works  
For love of Thee, nor that I feel as one  
Who cannot die; but there is that in me  
Which turns to Thee, which loves or which should love.

Vol. I. p. 37.

In these last four lines Browning touches a certain modernism in religious thought. His love of God is not built up on arguments of design or beneficence in nature, nor upon any

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evidence arising out of the conviction of a life to come ; but just out of the deep, subtle and resistless realisation of what human nature truly is. In the depths of his own soul he finds God ; in knowing himself, he knows Him also.

Thus a strong religious element is exhibited in this earliest poem. Does the religious vein continue? Is his last message in harmony with his first?

“Paracelsus” is two years later than “Pauline.” Paracelsus seeks to attain power through knowledge ; he attains, or the world judges him to have attained, but he knows that he has not. He has sunk to lower levels. He regrets the old times :

Gone, gone,  
Those pleasant times ! Does not the moaning wind  
Seem to bewail that we have gained such gains  
And bartered sleep for them ?

Vol. ii. p. 108.

He has bartered away some priceless things, the moral powers which youth so often thinks slightly of, but which make the best part of our being :

Love, hope, fear, faith—these make humanity ;  
These are its sign and note and character,  
And these I have lost !—gone, shut from me for ever,  
Like a dead friend safe from unkindness more.

Vol. ii. p. 109.

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Paracelsus, scorning the cheap success of popularity, and moved by a sort of trust in men and a respect and sympathy for them, began

To teach them, not amaze them, to impart  
The spirit which should instigate the search  
Of truth.

Vol. ii. p. 115.

Forthwith the multitude deserted him. He resolves to try the life of emotions.

For every joy is gain,  
And gain is gain, however small.

Vol. ii. p. 121.

Here, too, he meets with disappointment. He returns to his friends to die. He surveys his a career. Whatever it has been he has learned message from God, and that he will give to those who gather round his death-bed.

I will tell  
God's message; but I have so much to say,  
I fear to leave half out. All is confused  
No doubt; but doubtless you will learn in time.  
He would not else have brought you here: no doubt  
I shall see clearer soon.

FESTUS: Tell me but this—  
You are not in despair?

PARACELSUS: I? and for what?

. . . . .

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Well. 'Tis a strange thing : I am dying, Festus,  
          . . . . The hurricane is spent,  
And the good boat speeds through the brightening  
          weather.

Vol. ii. pp. 159, 160.

Paracelsus rises from his couch—stands once  
more—takes his couch for his throne.

Here God speaks to men through me.

Vol. ii. p. 163.

He is happy—yes, pardoned—but each man  
must live out his own life frankly.

We have to live alone to set forth well  
God's praise.

Vol. ii. p. 164.

He has realised that God tastes an infinite joy  
in the life of His creatures.

God tastes an infinite joy  
In infinite ways—one everlasting bliss,  
From whom all being emanates, all power  
Proceeds : in whom is life for evermore,  
Yet whom existence in its lowest form  
Includes ; where dwells enjoyment there is He.

Vol. ii. p. 167.

Above, birds fly in merry flocks, the lark  
Soars up and up, shivering for very joy :  
Afar the ocean sleeps. . . . .  
          . . . . . And God renews  
His ancient rapture. Thus He dwells in all,

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From life's minute beginnings, up at last  
To man—the consummation of this scheme  
Of being, the completion of this sphere  
Of life.

Vol. ii. p. 168.

Life and life's powers are to be used by men ;  
but not blindly nor yet under the light of complete knowledge.

Power—neither put blindly forth, nor controlled  
Calmly by perfect knowledge ; to be used  
At risk, inspired or checked by hope and fear :  
Knowledge—not intuition, but the slow  
Uncertain fruit of an enhancing toil,  
Strengthened by love.

Vol. ii. pp. 168, 169.

Strengthened by love, for he has learned his mistake in scorning the education which comes through the affection, the poet Aprile has followed love as Paracelsus had followed knowledge ; and in Aprile's experience Paracelsus had gained a lesson.

I learned my own deep error : love's undoing  
Taught me the worth of love in man's estate,  
And what proportion love should hold with power  
In his right constitution : love preceding  
Power, and with much power, always much more love.

Vol. ii. p. 175.

Thus Paracelsus through experiences, failures and sins, reaches a firmer grasp on God and on

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life's meaning. He dies, but faith is strong as a shining light with him at the last.

If I stoop  
Into a dark tremendous sea of cloud,  
It is but for a time ; I press God's lamp  
Close to my breast ; its splendour, soon or late,  
Will pierce the gloom : I shall emerge one day.

Vol. ii. p. 177.

It will be seen that Browning's intense interest lies in the working and experience of the human soul; he expresses this frankly in the dedication to "Sordello." "The historical decoration was purposely of no more importance than a background requires ; and my stress lay on the incidents in the development of a soul : little else is worth study. I, at least, always thought so—you" (M. Milsand of Dijon to whom he dedicates the poem), "with many known and unknown to me, think so—others may one day think so." (Vol. i. p. 49.) This was written in 1863, when Browning was more than fifty years old and thirty years after "Pauline" was written. His interest in the growth and development of man's soul had been steady and persistent. He believed that when the experiences of the soul were fitly understood, the educating value of life would be perceived, and the environing love

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of God would be realised. Thirteen years later, he puts the case of a man who had a friend whom he loved, though unseen; he dreamed "there was none like him, none above him."

Loved I not his letters full of beauty ?  
Not his actions famous far and wide ?  
Absent, he would know I vowed him duty ;  
Present, he would find me at his side.

"Fears and Scruples," vol. xiv., p. 54.

But unpleasant rumours are put about. The letters which were so full of beauty are said to be forgeries. The famous actions were perhaps not his at all. The absent friend gives no sign, makes no effort to refute these calumnies : worse slanders rise ; the friend is secretly spying on everybody and is ready to blame those who did not see him through the brick walls behind which he is concealed. When this is told, the listener is inclined to call the absent friend a "monster;" but he is checked.

Hush, I pray you !  
What if this friend happen to be—God ?

*Ibid.* vol. xiv. pp. 55-57.

Or turn to a poem in a happier vein—"Rabbi Ben Ezra." The old Rabbi tells us that the "best is yet to be." Life is a preparation, a moulding of man—and realising this,

Should not the heart beat once—"How good to live and learn" ?

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He, like Paracelsus, learns that love as well  
as power must be recognised in life,

Praise be thine !

I see the whole design,

I, who saw power, see love now perfect too :

Perfect I call thy plan ;

Thanks that I was a man !

Maker, remake, complete, I trust what Thou shalt do !

Vol. vii. p. 112.

Therefore I summon age

To grant youth's heritage,

Life's struggle having so far reached its term :

Thence shall I pass, approved

A man, for aye removed

From the developed brute : a god though in the germ.

Vol. vii. p. 113.

For God sees the capacity for development  
and growth which men cannot see in one  
another. Man worthless to his fellow men is  
deemed worth some care on God's part. Life  
like a whirling wheel flings to-day into the back-  
ground ; all seems fleeting and changing ; but if  
we note the potter's wheel, it is the wheel which  
flies : the potter and the clay are still there.

Fool ! All that is, at all,

Lasts ever, past recall :

Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand sure :

What entered into thee

*That* was, is, and shall be :

Time's wheel runs back or stops : Potter and clay endure.

Vol. vii. p. 118.



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God then is a supreme Need in human life.  
His are the hands which reach through darkness  
forming men.

But I need, now as then,  
Thee, God, who moulded men.

Vol. vii. p. 119.

This being so, let man resign himself to God's  
care and workmanship.

So, take and use Thy work :  
Amend what flaws may lurk,  
What strain o' the stuff, what warpings past the aim !  
My times be in Thy hand !  
Perfect the cup as planned !

Let age approve of youth, and death complete the same.

Vol. vii. p. 119.

The same clear faith breaks out in his latest  
works. He returns to the thought that it is not  
enough to realise power. Life is not clearly  
seen till love enters into our vision.

I have faith such end shall be ;  
From the first, Power was—I knew.  
Life has made clear to me  
That, strive but for closer view,  
Love were as plain to see.

“Asolando,” p. 155.

We are struck by the persistence of the same  
thought through life. In “Paracelsus” (1835)  
Browning had declared, as we have seen, that

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power needed love to help out the perfecting of man's life. To increase knowledge or power without increasing love is to miss the mark of man's being. Fifty-four years later he returns to the same thought. He knew "power" of course at the dawn of his intelligent life; but the life of experience has served to impress upon him the need and the existence of love. Naked power behind all things would not satisfy men, and close inspection and nearer vision reveal that love is as clearly to be seen in the universe as are the manifestations of power. Thus age attests the instincts of youth. The same voice which spoke in the morning is heard at evening time. There is a strength and manliness about the man who thus delivers his message, lives, tests it and in his closing years is resolved to bear witness to it again. Experience may have robbed him of some of life's illusions, but it has only served to strengthen his conviction of the love which is behind all. It is this strong and manly soul which sings a cheerful and courageous song to the last. He looks upon the men of the generation which are growing up to their responsibilities and he gives them his message: he leaves behind him the legacy of his experience, the witness of his own strong and vigorous

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personality. "Accept faith," he says; "don't waste time in wishing for a different sort of life from that which you are called to live; be brave enough to live under the inevitable conditions of this present life: don't whimper your energy into sentimentality: exert your power: front dark things with courage, and perplexing things with faith: a courageous life is an interpreting life: it casts light upon problems which daunt cowardly men. In spite of all perplexing questions, there is such a thing as spring time, and God is over all. Be such as I have sought to be."

What had I on earth to do  
With the slothful, with the mawkish, the unmanly?  
Like the aimless, helpless, hopeless, did I drivel  
—Being—who?

One who never turned his back but marched breast forward,  
Never doubted clouds would break,  
Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would  
triumph,  
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,  
Sleep to wake.

No, at noonday in the bustle of man's worktime  
Greet the unseen with a cheer!  
Bid him forward, breast and back as either should be,  
"Strive and thrive!" cry, "Speed—fight on, fare ever  
There as here!"

Pp. 156, 157.

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Such is Browning's invigorating message to the men of his generation—a message, wholesome, sagacious, self-restrained, never ignoring the existence of difficulties, but always insisting on the practical wisdom which refuses to whimper hysterically because life is not as we think it ought to be, a message always proclaiming that the best revealer of life's mysteries is life lived, always believing that there is good here and now, and that the best is yet to come; yet that that best is only for the man who does his duty well, fights bravely where he is placed, striving to turn his life's opportunities to good, believing in right, in love and in God.

## CHAPTER XII

### BROWNING

BROWNING acknowledged that he loved a full life—a life that could “see, know, taste, feel all.” He longed, as Tennyson did, to

    pile fresh life on life, and dull  
    The sharp desire of knowledge still with knowing!  
    Art, Science, Nature, everything is full  
    As my own soul is full, to overflowing.

As we turn over Browning's works we feel how intensely and fully Browning lived his intellectual life. All sorts of themes, thoughts, peoples, incidents appeal to him. He has sympathy with life in all its forms. Every expression of life interests him. He will find subject for speculation and poetic treatment in life mediæval or modern, eastern or western. He will dig out of the obscure lore of the past some forgotten tale of Italian life and intrigue, and will re clothe it and reveal its abiding human attractiveness.

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He will follow the strange or subtle workings of religious thought in Jewish, Mohammedan, or Christian minds. He delights in art, and in the struggles, defeats and triumphs of the artistic soul. All who labour for self-expression find a sympathetic exponent in him. He realises the intensity of the passion of self-expression: he sees the dangers and temptations which wait upon this passion. He delights in picturing the self-communings of these artist souls as they try to measure their achievements against their ideals. So he gives us pictures of these solemn tribunals of life and soul—now it is the Painter, as in “Andrea del Sarto,” or in “Pictor Ignotus”: now it is the Musician, as in “Abt Vogler.”

These self-communings interest us; they are dramatic in feeling. But they interest us, because they stand for more than dramatic monologues, or the mere artist's attempt to measure his life's work; they suggest, if we may so express it, principles of life-measurement. Or, to put it in another way. Every man is a life-artist: every man can take himself to task, and measure his life against some ideal or dream of what was once possible to him.

To follow Browning truly, however, we must fix our thoughts on the artist, his desire of self-

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expression, and the snares and difficulties which hinder his utterance.

The first and obvious difficulty lies in the oppositions which seem to develop between the thought and the form, between the idea and the conditions of the material in which it must be expressed. It is the difficulty which Dante realised :

Ver' è che, come forma non s'accorda  
Molte fiata alla intenzion dell' arte,  
Perch' a risponder la materia è sorda.

PAR. i. 127-9.

'Tis true, that often—as from artist's hand  
A form proceeds not answering his design,  
Because the matter hears not his command.

[WRIGHT'S Translation.]

Out of this lack of ready responsiveness in the material springs the temptation to allow the material somewhat to modify the idea. For instance, the artist in words is tempted to accept for rhyme or rhythm's sake a word which is not exactly fitted to his thought. He is tempted to allow his thought to be swayed by the exigencies of sound. The material depraves the idea. The choice before him is either to allow this or to wait and search for the true word which fits both sense and sound. The great artist will find it,

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but the lesser or the impatient will not wait. He may then take one of two courses. He may acquiesce in the victory of the material, and sacrifice sense to sound ; or he may insist on the sense and allow the discord or roughness in the music of his verse. The temptation is a test of the artist's soul. Cheap success may be won by sacrificing his thought to smoothness of diction ; but such a man is no longer true to his mistress, and whatever he may achieve in the way of technical success, he will always feel himself as somehow less and lower than men who, more obstinately truthful, are accounted failures.

In all walks of art there have been the men whose souls lived upon plains lower than their reputation, and who have won contemporary applause. But the few who refused to follow fashion have pierced below the surface, and seen the poverty of soul which technical skill has vainly sought to cover. One illustration may serve. It is found in Diderot's criticism on the works of the French poet, Saint-Lambert. Saint-Lambert was a well-known figure in Paris society.

His chief work—a poem, entitled “Les Saisons”—was well received in the fashionable world, and gained in public esteem by the



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approval of Voltaire. Voltaire was lavish in his promises of immortality to those poets who had eulogised his own writings. Nevertheless he may have been sincere in his admiration of Saint-Lambert's chief work, for more than once he declares that the poem will go down to posterity as a great literary monument. It is, in fact, like a flash of ancient glory redeeming the dulness of a decadent age. Diderot (cited by Sainte-Beuve) writes in very different terms. "You will tell me," he says, "that M. de Saint-Lambert is well educated. I admit it: he is more so than most men of letters, though perhaps less so than he imagines. He has mastery of his language? Yes, to a wonderful extent. He thinks? I can believe it. He has feeling? Certainly. He has technical capacity? Yes, such as few possess. He has an ear? Undoubtedly. He is musical? Always. What then is lacking to make him a poet? What he lacks is a self-inquiring soul, an ardent spirit, a strong and overflowing imagination, more strings to his lyre; his has too few. Ah! a great poet is indeed rare."

For a moment reflect upon this criticism. Here is a man who possesses knowledge, skill, thought, musical quality, mastery of harmony and numbers, but who lacks the strong, ardent

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and inspiring soul. Correctness of ear and technical power, even when guided by knowledge and capacity, will not avail without the soul-force, the struggling of the imagination and desire, the ardour of the immortal, unsatisfied spirit. Let these thoughts introduce us to one of Browning's best-known poems—"Andrea del Sarto." Andrea del Sarto has been called "the faultless painter." In technical gift he had few equals: he is set before us as a master of all the mechanical secrets of his art: in correctness of delineation, in harmony of colouring, and in grasp of his craft, he is pre-eminent. But—and here is the sadness of the thing—he lacks, just what Diderot declared Saint-Lambert lacked, the fervent, boiling soul, burning with imagination, so ardent to express himself that he was less careful of correctness of form than of truthfulness to his own imagination. Andrea del Sarto, according to Browning's picturing of him, is alive to his deficiency. He is speaking to his wife:

I can do with my pencil what I know,  
What I see, what at bottom of my heart  
I wish for, if I ever wish so deep—  
Do easily, too—when I say, perfectly,  
I do not boast, perhaps; yourself are judge  
Who listened to the Legate's talk last week,  
And just as much they used to say in France.

## The Religious Spirit in the Poets

Thus the power of execution he boasts is faultless. It is a power too which he can exercise without effort, and without experiencing the agony of failure which afflicts others.

'Tis easy, all of it !  
No sketches first, no studies, that's long past ;  
I do what many dream of, all their lives,  
—Dream ? strive to do and agonise to do,  
And fail in doing. I could count twenty such  
On twice your fingers, and not leave this town,  
Who strive—you don't know how the others strive  
To paint a little thing like that you smeared  
Carelessly passing with your robes afloat,—  
Yet do much less, so much less. . . .

But his sense of his own superior ease in the exercise of his craft gives him no ground for self-satisfaction. He realises the greatness which may exist in failure, the littleness which may accompany success :

Well, less is more, Lucrezia : I am judged.  
— There burns a truer light of God in them,  
In their vexed beating stuffed and stopped-up brain,  
Heart, or whate'er else, than goes on to prompt  
This low-pulsed forthright craftsman's hand of mine.

He lacks the bubbling animated soul that takes fire at praise and takes fire at blame—feeling keenly and intensely the thing which has inspired them, and who therefore are fiercely gladdened when it is recognised in praise and

## Browning

fiercely angered when they fail to make it felt or seen. Their faults and failures are agony to them: the contrast between what they have done and what they strove to do is a source of exquisite pain.

Their works drop groundward, but themselves, I know,  
Reach many a time a heaven that's shut to me,  
Enter and take their place there sure enough,  
Though they come back and cannot tell the world.  
My works are nearer heaven, but I sit here.

And it is just because he can achieve what he wills, and easily achieve it, that he is denied the fierce agonies which these others feel. They are ebullient beings, his is a placid soul: they feel deeply, strongly: he is not easily stirred by praise or blame.

The sudden blood of these men ! at a word—  
Praise them, it boils, or blame them, it boils too.  
I, painting from myself and to myself,  
Know what I do, am unmoved by men's blame  
Or their praise either.

This placid self-satisfaction is like the denial of heaven to him. Heaven is surely the ideal which always lies beyond the grasp, and therefore always provokes a higher and yet higher reach. To be without unsatisfied ideals is to be without heaven :

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Ah! but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,  
Or what's a heaven for? All is silver-grey,  
Placid and perfect with my art: the worse!

In contrast to this stands the man portrayed in "Pictor Ignotus." He is a painter conscious of power, but he shrinks from all that might degrade his art. He will not stoop to chaffer or to bargain, or to please the idle and ignorant crowd. He has not only an intellectual but an ethical ideal concerning art. The very contact of the worldly spirit is a thing to be shrunk from.

I could have painted pictures like that youth's  
Ye praise so.

He would have rejoiced in the triumphant use of his gift, instinct with fires from God; but he would rather see his pictures fading quietly upon the convent's walls than expose them to the higgling or the appraisalment of the crowd. Is the draught of fame acceptable when it comes charged with grains of earthliness? Are there not things which spoil art's music?

O youth, men praise so—holds their praise its worth?  
Blown harshly, keeps the trump its golden cry?  
Tastes sweet the water with such specks of earth?

"Pictor Ignotus."

To be true to one's true self is a necessity to the true artist. His thought must prevail: his

## Browning

sense of the dignity and purity of his art must be unspoilt. He must be faithful to express the things he heard. He must make all according to the pattern showed him in the mount.

It is true that his may be an art which leaves no enduring monument behind. He may build an edifice exceeding magnificent, but one which perishes in the building; but what of that, if in the only instrument at his command he expresses the true messages, if he is not disobedient to the heavenly vision. So Abt Vogler reasons as the last sound of the melodies he has called forth dies away, and

Gone at last, the palace of music

that he reared.

Therefore to whom turn I but to Thee, the ineffable Name ?

Builder and maker, Thou, of houses not made with hands !

What, have fear of change from Thee who art ever the same ?

Doubt that thy power can fill the heart that thy power expands ?

There shall never be one lost good ! What was, shall live as before ;

The evil is null, is nought, is silence implying sound ;

What was good, shall be good, with, for evil, so much good more ;

On the earth the broken arcs ; in the heaven, a perfect round.

“ Abt Vogler.”

The difficulty which besets the artist in the

## The Religious Spirit in the Poets

expression of his thoughts awaits us all. We too have to struggle for self-expression. We too are torn between the claims of the ideal and of the actual. The question long asked by men : "Is it possible to make the best of both worlds?" is only another way of stating the difficulty.

It is a question which emerges in the realm of philosophy and in that of conduct. In philosophy we ask, "Can we reconcile the finite with the infinite?" In our efforts, for instance, to realise the Supreme Being we find ourselves face to face with two opposing demands. This divine Being must be universal, all diffused, breathing His presence in all and through all : He must surpass definition and be above all concrete embodiment ; and yet if He is to be God to us, He must be in a sort personal and so far individual. In other words, our thought of the Supreme Being asks the combination of two things which appear contradictory. The same difficulty meets us in the realm of conduct. We are placed in the middle of a life of limitations ; time and space hedge us in ; yet we are conscious of infinite yearnings, and we realise that over our heads is the measureless unseen, the realm which for lack of a better name we call

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the heavenly world, the other world. Between the calls of these two realms we find ourselves divided. Shall we ignore the call of the unseen and give ourselves wholly to the world we know?

So the secular impulse, supporting itself by many trite axioms of so-called common sense, counsels us, "Live in the present : enjoy now : take no heed of the things unknown : enter into the circle of the things seen." But we cannot take this counsel without grave misgivings. We are environed by the infinite ; there are other impulses as potent as the secular impulses ; these also have voices which bid us realise that we have affinity with the unseen and the eternal. We are as men living on an island. The plains and hills and rivers of our island home gladden our eyes and appeal to our energies. Among these meadows and cornfields we have to live : from them we must derive our sustenance. Why should we waste our time in wandering wistful and aimless by the margin of the monotonous sea, on which never a white sail appears, and which never brings tidings of any far-off land ? Leave the sea-shore and the empty complaining of the hollow-sounding sea. Get to the plains ; drive the earnest plough along fresh furrows ;



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sow the seed over the rich and waiting soil; take the sickle and reap the harvest of the yellow corn. "Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die." Yet even as we grasp the plough or wield the sickle, we still hear the hoarse murmur of the great ocean; across the fields will float some white-winged bird and shake salt drops downwards as it circles overhead and turns to seek the sea again; and as we reverse our plough to drive the backward furrow we catch the sun-glint upon the waves—

Our Souls have sight of that immortal sea  
Which brought us hither,  
Can in a moment travel thither,  
And see the children sport upon the shore,  
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.

While, therefore, secular minds refuse to listen to the voices of the infinite ocean which surrounds human life, we cannot be deaf to its music; but neither can we throw in our lot with those who wander ceaselessly and aimlessly on the beach and leave to others the toil of sowing and reaping in the fields of our island home. We wish to combine both—to take our share in the work of our present home without forgetting the beauty and the voices of the unmeasured and mysterious sea. We would live in the finite

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without forgetting the infinite. We would do our duty among the things seen without forgetting the things unseen.

There have been times in which the fashion of human life has been to think little of the things seen : to neglect the present world and our duty towards it, in the supposed interests of the world to come. There have been ages of asceticism, in which flight from the world has been the highest ideal of human duty, in which lean faces and attenuated frames have been admired more than healthy beauty, when hysteria has passed for inspiration and the neglect of the body has been the symbol of piety. On the other hand there have been ages in which the opposite tendency has been in fashion. Then artists have given to us stalwart Madonnas, stout and sturdy angels, and saints and doctors with a decided tendency to corpulence. Care of the body has run in the direction of self-indulgence, and the thought of the unseen has become dim and distant as a little cloud, like a man's hand rising out of the sea—ignored as it travelled over the ocean, and only realised and recognised when death or desperate necessity revealed it as near at hand or breaking into storm. Such an age was the Renaissance. History gives us a vivid personal

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picture of its influence. When Leo X. became Pope a certain youth named Pietro Paolo Boscoli was involved in a conspiracy and condemned to die. He had drunk into the spirit of his age. His mind was filled with semi-pagan thoughts and the conduct of life largely inspired by classical examples. To slay tyrants, as Brutus did, seemed no unworthy ambition. Yet face to face with death, the desire of an anchorage in the unseen awoke; and Boscoli, having lived under a pagan sky wished to die under a Christian one. But it is hard to change one's heaven at the hour of death, and to take a heart-grasp upon nobler ideals when the sands of time are running out, and Boscoli could not dismiss in a moment thoughts and aims and wishes which had become like the very texture of his nature. "Drive Brutus away," was his cry, "that I may take the last step wholly as a Christian." It is a picture of the conflict of a soul divided against itself—earnest to forget what it has known and to grasp that which it has not made the heritage of its heart.

There were many in that age and in similar ages who had less earnestness towards faith than poor Boscoli. There were men who had accepted the world and the joy and refinement

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of the then world as their real portion. "Let us enjoy the Papacy since God has given it to us," was the saying attributed to Leo X. when he was elected to the most responsible place in Christendom. "We must enjoy," sang his kinsman Lorenzo dei Medici, "we must enjoy; there is no certainty of to-morrow."

We can from these hints form a picture of a conventional bishop of the Renaissance. He is one who accepted his bishopric as a good thing; it gave him the opportunity of indulging his artistic tastes and enjoying the refined cultivation of his times, not neglecting its classical studies and its coarser pleasures. He has had a time of unalloyed self-satisfaction. He is proud of his nice taste in Latin scholarship; he has a full and sensitive appreciation of architectural splendour; he took a real interest in the enrichment and beautification of his cathedral; he felt in himself the reflected glory of its stately services; he has been a careful and artful collector of rare stones and curios; he has accumulated wealth, and built fair villas which he can bequeath to his natural sons, who for decency's sake are called his nephews. And now he has come to die, but unlike poor Boscoli there is no earnest struggle to grasp some lofty truth or

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simple teaching of Christ; he has never had moral earnestness enough to struggle even for a doubtful good, or to risk anything for the overthrow of what seemed evil. He has lived the life of cultivated self-indulgence, of a carefully calculated Epicureanism. Self has been its centre all through. Of course it is only becoming that he should use the conventional language which speaks of the world as vanity. But utterances such as these cannot alter the main current of his life-habits. He is on his death-bed just the man he ever was, retaining still the same worldly, sensual ideas of happiness as he had in life. He is interested mainly in himself. He has no misgiving, but the misgiving which comes upon him in paroxysms of petulance that his wishes for posthumous self-glorification will not be attended to when he is gone, that his heirs will scamp his monument and not erect the sumptuous tomb which he had so carefully designed and for which he had so long prepared. It is the death-bed of such a man that Browning describes in his poem entitled, "The Bishop orders his tomb in St. Praxed's Church." The Bishop is lying in bed, and his nephews and heirs are gathered round him. His mind wanders now and again into broken

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memories, but it returns persistently to its own ruling desire of a splendid memorial after death. So vivid is this desire that he half believes he will be able to share in the delight of its splendour. He has no regrets for his selfish and self-indulgent past; he has no joyous curiosity concerning heaven: he has no aspiration for the vision of God, no hunger for the sight of his Redeemer. Of course all is vanity, for he has to die; but he lives in the greedy thought of the magnificent tomb in which he will lie, still a personage in his own cathedral, outshining in the canopied splendour of his monument all his rivals, and commemorated in a choice Latin inscription of his own composition:

Vanity, saith the Preacher, vanity!  
Draw round my bed—

What's done is done and she is dead beside,  
Dead long ago, and I am Bishop since,  
And as she died so must we die ourselves,  
And thence ye may perceive the world's a dream.  
. . . . . Peace, peace seems all,  
Saint Praxed's ever was the church for peace;  
And so, about this tomb of mine.

His tomb cannot be in the corner he had chosen; for Gandolf has cozened him and secured it; but there is a good niche left

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whence the pulpit and part of the choir may be seen ; and if Gandolf has the choicer niche, he can outstrip Gandolf by the costliness and splendour of a tomb of black basalt with its nine columns of peach-blossom marble, with its huge globe of lapis lazuli, with its richly decorated frieze and its epitaph in Ciceronian Latin. He delights, as he lies on his dying bed, to fancy himself as though lying through eternity beneath the stately monument.

For as I lie here, hours of the dead night,  
Dying in state and by such slow degrees,  
I fold my arms as if they clasped a crook,  
And stretch my feet forth straight as stone can point,  
And let the bedclothes, for a mortcloth, drop  
Into great laps and folds of sculptor's work.

He is of the world worldly, and even the solemnity of his departing hour can raise no spiritual images, and evoke no noble regrets within his soul. He has lived for no ideal: his nature is low-levelled to the last. His very contentment is appalling ; for it is the contentment of a being who has lost even the wish to aspire.

If the Bishop gives the picture of a character who has quenched all spiritual ideals, "Easter Day" gives us the picture of one who has lowered

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but not lost his ideal, and who, at any rate, awakes to the fact that he has done so.

Two men are discussing questions of faith on an Easter Eve. The one represents the spirit of the period when the demand went forth for proofs of faith. The burden of his contention is that it is hard to believe; but the burden of the other man's heart is not the difficulty of belief, but the difficulty of living out his belief. How hard it is to be a Christian. He contends that complete knowledge would vitiate the value of life, which requires room for doubt in order that there may be moral probation and moral progress. He has had experiences in life—a wondrous vision—which convinced him that even while he thought he was living a Christian life, he was really living a worldly life. It is true that he had renounced certain worldly pleasures for religion's sake; but the dazzling vision of a sky all aflame with judgment shows him that at heart he has chosen the world: it is the world and the world-joy that he hankers after: he sees himself—professed Christian though he is—he sees himself, as he truly is, a worldling. He finds too that even the gift of the world will not suffice for the soul of man, that the very power which gives charm to art is the sense of, and the



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striving after, that which is more than the world. The gift of the world not being capable of satisfying him, he declares that he will live for love. Whereupon the voice in the vision replies with wonder that he has been so long in claiming love as his portion—for was he not a disciple of a faith which was based on love? He has claimed a sort of merit in the small renunciations he made for religion's sake, while he was the child of a religion which hinged upon a love which made no reckoning of any sacrifice for love's sake. Did he think the story of the love of Christ was a thing of no practical value or spiritual significance, a thing to be doubted or set aside because too good to be true, because it was a story of too much love? In man's esteem, judging from man's hates and selfishness, it might seem too much love; but could it be so in very truth, or in God's view—

He who in all His works below  
Adapted to the needs of man,  
Made love the basis of the plan?

The voice of the vision has wrought a change in this so-called Christian man. Now he is content to accept life as it was given him. He is content to encounter

## Browning

Darkness, hunger, toil, distress :  
Be all the earth a wilderness !  
Only let me go on, go on,  
Still hoping ever and anon  
To reach one eve the Better Land !

As he makes this prayer, the figure in his vision changes and dilates. He knows whom he has met.

Then did the form expand, expand—  
I knew Him through the dread disguise  
As the whole God within His eyes  
Embraced me.

Henceforward his joy is to think that he is not outside the divine love, nor shut up within the narrow limits of earth. As he speaks the Easter dawn breaks, and he catches the glimpse of larger and brighter thoughts than he has before known : the measurelessness of the divine mercy spreads everywhere like the light of new morning, since Christ is risen.

There is a saying of St. Paul's which needs much careful thought and which calls us to wider realisation of what Christ is to mankind, "Though we have known Christ after the flesh yet now henceforth know we Him no more," are the Apostle's words. Do they not summon us to recognise not merely the historical, but the Eternal Christ ? Do they not mean that though

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Christ was manifested in time, yet that the Eternal Christ is and must be beyond and above all time? Is it not this Eternal Christ which all men—and pre-eminently we ourselves and the men of our generation—need to know? And if a man shall be found who will tell us that he believes in a Christ who transcends all pictures and images which men may make of Him, who reveals Himself to human souls in divergent ways and in ways richly various because suited to man's varying needs, and that this Eternal Christ is the Christ he can cling to and believe in—shall we say of such a man that he is not a Christian? If so, let Browning be so accounted; but if to be helped to realise a Christ, who is greater than any even inspired man can image forth, be a truly Christian work, then let us welcome Browning as a religious, nay a Christian teacher; for this he has striven to do.

Turn to the Epilogue to the poems entitled "Dramatis Personæ" (vol. vii. 250, ed. 1888). First David appears and sings the old Hebrew Psalm, proclaiming how the glory of God fills his Temple. Then Renan follows with a dirge-like song, lamenting how the vision of divine glory has rolled away, and with its passing has passed the vision of that Face of incarnate Love

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which had brought to the world its sweetest and sublimest hope. As Renan's song ends, Browning takes up his parable. The world is a problem to men indeed; things change, advance and recede, but man follows and so his advance is secured. Need we mourn things lost when loss means gain, and we part with the lesser to find the nobler, with the transient to find the eternal? Shall we mourn the vanishing of David's Temple when we find ourselves worshipping in a vaster one?

Why, where's the need of Temple, when the walls  
O' the world are that? What use of swells and falls  
From Levites' choir, Priests' cries and trumpet calls?

Shall we imagine that the Face of everlasting  
Love can be lost because things change?

That one face, far from vanish, rather grows,  
Or decomposes but to recompose,  
Become my universe that feels and knows.

One time, we are told, Browning read aloud this epilogue to his friend, Mrs. Sutherland Orr, and as he finished these lines which declared the eternity of the Face which men bewailed as vanishing, he said:

"That face is the face of Christ. That is how I feel Him!"







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